

THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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A VALIANT IGNORANCE.

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CHAPTER XXXII.

MORE than one of the people who had talked to Mrs. Romayne in the interval had been vaguely aware of a certain incontrollable preoccupation behind her vivacity of manner; though the intense, suppressed excitement in which that preoccupation originated passed undetected. Her restless eyes fastened upon Miss Pomeroy and Julian on the very instant of their reappearance in the room, and as they came towards her that excitement leapt up suddenly and lit up her whole face with a wild flash of hope and anticipation. They drew nearer and it died down again even more suddenly than it had sprung up; and in its passing it seemed to have aged her face curiously, and to have left upon it a stamp of heart-sick disappointment, touched with a deadly, creeping anxiety. Miss Pomeroy was pale, and her usual still placidity seemed to be accentuated into absolute stupidity. Julian's face was quite colourless, and beneath the travesty of his usual manner which he assumed in speaking to his mother, there was an indefinable expression which made him look ten years older and twenty years harder and more bitter.

Scuples on his part as to crushing their dress prevented his going home with them. He would follow in a hansom, he said. But before he arrived Miss Pomeroy had said good night to Mrs. Romayne with a neatly-turned and quite meaningless expression of the pleasure the

evening had given her, and had retired to her room. Mrs. Romayne, looking haggard and worn, lingered until Julian came in, and went out to meet him.

"Good night, mother," he said, and went straight upstairs without pausing.

It was many, many years since he had left her at night without a kiss; and as Mrs. Romayne went slowly up to her room through the silent house, she stumbled once or twice as though her wide, dry eyes hardly saw the stairs before her.

That creeping anxiety had gained ground greatly in her face the next morning when she came down at about half-past ten, to learn from the servant that "Mr. Julian" had already breakfasted and had gone to the Temple. Even more pathetic than that anxiety itself was the courage that battled against it; that strove so hard to become confidence as she led—and, indeed, sustained—the conversation, as she and Miss Pomeroy, who was late in putting in an appearance, breakfasted together. She talked lightly and gaily of Julian's defection on this their visitor's last morning; she deplored the fact that it was indeed the last morning, talking of various half-formed schemes for such constant meetings as would be practically a continuance of the intimate association of the past fortnight. But of response she obtained little or none. An access of conventionality, demureness, and insipidity seemed to be inspiring Miss Pomeroy; an access characterised by a certain absolute obstinacy of colourlessness. She had no opinions, no sentiments of any sort or kind to offer; her expressions of regret at leaving were as unmeaning as they were correct. Mrs. Romayne's plans seemed to wither under her little non-committal smile and comment; and she took her irreproach-

able leave an hour later with a vaguely-expressed hope that they might meet "somewhere," and apparently without hearing Mrs. Romayne's parting allusion to Julian.

Each one of the days that followed seemed to leave upon Mrs. Romayne's face some such effect—in a much more subtle degree—as might have been produced upon a marble counterpart of that face by the skilful application of a sharp modelling tool. Every feature became a little sharper; every line a little deeper, a little harder. Nobody noticed the fact, and nobody could have traced it to its source had they done so; for any expression other than that expression of gaiety which was habitual with her, was kept at bay even in her eyes. But there were times when she was alone, when in its very relaxation it became apparent how gallant the struggle was; how desperate was the courage which would not cease to be hope; times when that chisel under which she grew more haggard every day revealed itself as heart-sick, gnawing anxiety.

For three or four days Miss Pomeroy's hope that they might meet "somewhere" remained unfulfilled; and Mrs. Romayne made little jokes at what she assumed to be Julian's disconsolate condition—jokes which, taken in conjunction with the look in her eyes as she spoke them, were almost ghastly. Then the meeting took place at a party from which, as it appeared, Miss Pomeroy and her mother were just departing; so that a few words of greeting on either side was all that passed.

Mrs. Pomeroy and her daughter called on Mrs. Romayne a day or two later. It was Mrs. Romayne's "day," of course; the room was very full, and as Mrs. Pomeroy said, with an expression as near apprehension as was compatible with her placidity in the eyes which kept turning to her daughter's demure face: "Wednesday is such a popular day, and we've really dozens of calls to pay, haven't we, Maud?" Consequently they stayed barely ten minutes, and exchanged half-a-dozen sentences with their hostess. But short and formal as the call was, it was supplemented by no more intimate intercourse. They met, of course, nearly every day. That is to say, Mrs. Romayne, as she went about indefatigably from party to party, caught constant glimpses of Miss Pomeroy and

her mother just arriving as she left, just leaving as she arrived, just going to supper, to tea, to fulfil some social duty or other which made it impossible that more than a word or two should pass. When Mrs. Romayne pressed Miss Pomeroy with sprightly reproaches to come and see her, she was met invariably with pretty unmeaning smiles, and vague words about engagements, which, gentle as they sounded, proved as little capable of manipulation as a stone. Once or twice after such a meeting, Mrs. Romayne's jokes at Julian's expense, as she told him of them airily afterwards—Julian and Miss Pomeroy never seemed to meet now—took the form of hints and innuendoes as to whether he was not at the bottom of "the mystery," as she called it, and whether he could not perhaps sweep it away. There was a terrible contrast between the casual gaiety with which such hints were dropped by her, and the something which lay behind; something which gave her voice a strange, unnatural ring, and cut her words off almost before they had any meaning; something which dominated even that agony of anxiety; something the name of which, as it lurked in the hard, bright eyes which never met Julian's, was nervous fear.

Such hints were always met and turned by Julian as lightly as they were uttered.

Before a fortnight had passed since Miss Pomeroy's departure, Mrs. Romayne had acquired a habit of giving one quick, almost furtive, glance round any room she entered in which people were assembled, and that look was particularly eager and intent as she entered a drawing-room to fulfil an engagement for a luncheon-party one day at the beginning of the third week. A luncheon is by no means a bad opportunity for a "quiet chat." She did not see the figures she was in search of, though no one could have detected that fact from her expression. Nor could any one have interpreted the sudden exclamation of surprise she uttered. It sounded little more artificial than usual.

"Why, it's Dennis Falconer!" she said prettily. "I had no idea you were in town."

It was Dennis Falconer; not a little altered by the past eight months, and altered for the better. Six months earlier he had disappeared from the ken of his society acquaintances; disappeared quietly, almost imperceptibly. By-and-by, when his absence began to be commented upon,

rumour had whispered it abroad that he was "laid up or something." The fact, so lightly stated and equally lightly commented on, had meant for Falconer a realisation of the possibilities hinted at by his doctor early in November. He had passed from the dreariness of unoccupied and somewhat lonely club life into the infinitely heavier dreariness of an absolutely solitary sick-room.

Within his own limits and on his own lines Dennis Falconer was a strong man. With his dark hour absolutely upon him he braced himself to meet it with a stern, unconscious dignity; and he endured four months of physical suffering and mental tedium—from which that suffering, weary and unremitting as it was, was seldom acute enough to relieve him—with uncomplaining fortitude. He was quite alone. Circumstances had occurred to detain Dr. Aston in India, and his solitude was not realised by any of his club acquaintances. It was a period on which, in after life, he never willingly looked back; a dark hour, in truth. But it was lived through at last, and as it passed away it gave place to a clear and steady light, in which the shadows which had preceded it had vanished. Severe as had been the means, the end was amply attained. He emerged from his sick-room in such perfect physical health as he had not known for years. All the disabilities under which he had laboured during the preceding summer were removed, and in every nerve and muscle he was conscious of vigorous life. In May he had received his doctor's permission to return to his work, and he was in London now to arrange the preliminaries of an expedition with which he hoped to leave England early in the autumn.

The physical change in him was conspicuous as he stepped forward to return Mrs. Romayne's greeting. He looked ten years younger than he had been wont to look; the worn look of endurance had gone, and there was an air of strength and power about him which was very noticeable. Hardly less striking was the change in his expression. Much of the grim austerity of his demeanour during the previous summer had originated in the painful depression consequent on his state of health; much also in his realisation of his position as a man laid aside and so-lacing himself as best he might. The gravity and reserve of his expression remained, but the heaviness had disappeared completely.

His manner to Mrs. Romayne, as he shook the hand she held out to him, was significant of the lighter and more tolerant point of view from which his own lighter prospects unconsciously led him to contemplate his fellow-creatures. It was neither expansive nor friendly, but it lacked that undercurrent of stiff condemnation which had previously characterised it.

"I have intended to call on you," he said with grave directness. "I am sorry to appear negligent. But my time is no longer at my own disposal."

Mrs. Romayne put aside the claim on his time which he imputed to her with a quick gesture and a laugh.

"You are quite recovered, I hope?" she said easily. "Tiresome business, convalescence, isn't it?"

"I am quite recovered, I am thankful to say," responded Falconer; he was so keenly conscious of all that the words meant for him that he was insensible even to the jarring effect her manner had always had for him. "I hope before very long to be at work again. Indeed, I am practically at work now."

"Yes?" said Mrs. Romayne prettily. "Are you thinking of going abroad again?"

"I am going out to Africa. I shall hardly be in England again for another five years."

Mrs. Romayne had been looking vaguely about the room, evidently bestowing a modicum of her attention only on Falconer. But as he spoke the last words the slightest possible start passed through her frame and her wandering eyes suddenly ceased to wander. There was a moment's pause, and then she turned them on Falconer's face.

"Really? And when do you go?"

There was something rather odd beneath the carelessness of her voice, and her eyes, as she fixed them on Falconer's, were odd too.

"I hope to leave England early in October."

Mrs. Romayne made no reply. Her face suggested curiously that the actual exigencies of the situation had faded for her, that she was not in the present at all. For the moment there was no trace of that satisfaction and relief which would have been the natural consummation, on such news, of the defiance and distaste so hardly repressed in her manner to her "connexion" during the past year. She looked, apparently unconsciously, into the grave, steady man's face above her, and

there was a vague, half-formed expression in her eyes, which might have been a suddenly-stirred sense of loneliness or foreboding.

It was gone again in an instant. And as the man who was to take her into lunch approached her, she turned from Falconer with a little artificial gesture of farewell and the lightest possible "au revoir."

Falconer found himself very well situated at Inncheon. A question came up on which his word carried weight, and the discussion which ensued brought home to him that sense of renewed power and standing in the world so grateful to him after his long period of inaction. He was full of grave content and satisfaction, when, after lunch, circumstances threw him again with Mrs. Romayne; and his whole mental attitude was suffused with a dignified kindness. He began to speak at once with grave, but not unfriendly interest, and as though he were conscious of a certain remissness.

"I am glad to hear of your son. I hope it is quite satisfactory to you?"

Mrs. Romayne had acknowledged his vicinity with a conventional word and smile. Circumstances demanded of her at the moment no active exertion; she was standing aside, as it were, for the instant, and there were tired lines faintly visible about her mouth. They disappeared, however, as if by magic beneath the hard intentness which leapt into her face as she turned sharply to Falconer on his first words. The movement was apparently involuntary, for she turned away, lifting the long eye-glasses which she had lately adopted with elaborate carelessness, as though to cover the first movement, and said, as she looked through them at something at the other end of the room:

"It's very stupid of me, no doubt, but I must ask you to explain!"

The careless neutrality of her previous conversation with him had vanished as completely as the strange suggestion with which it had ended had vanished; the amnesty which his tone had, perhaps unconsciously, proposed was tacitly refused. The old defiance, apparently entirely uncalled-for, rang in her elaborately indifferent voice.

"Is it so old a story?" said Falconer. "Or is it, perhaps, a mistake?" he added with genuine regret. "I hope not. A sensible marriage is such a safeguard, a

covenant with society. I heard of your son's engagement some three weeks ago on what purported to be excellent authority."

"Did you hear the name of the young lady by any chance?"

Mrs. Romayne achieved a harsh little laugh as she spoke.

Falconer glanced round the room and lowered his voice.

"Miss Maud Pomeroy!" he said. "A most desirable wife for him, I should have said!"

Eight months before, under the inexplicable influence of the face and manner of the pale, dignified woman who had faced him so bravely in the little lodging in Camden Town, Dennis Falconer had been almost ready to urge upon Julian Romayne marriage with the girl he was supposed to have ruined. But he would have done so convinced in the recesses of his heart to which that woman's influence could not penetrate that such a course must mean ruin to the young man; and in the grim severity of his mental attitude at the time, he would have said that such ruin was the just and righteous consequence of the young man's guilt. Clemence's disappearance had frustrated the possibility of any such action on his part; time and the pressing actualities of his own life had obliterated the impression made on him; and the whole affair had gradually faded into the past. Insensibly to himself he looked upon it now, conventionally enough, as one of those dark episodes which are in no way to be obliterated or lightened, but which may and must be overlaid. To that end it seemed to him, in the relaxation of his sterner attitude, a thing so natural as to be necessarily condoned that Julian should marry in his own class and settle down.

A moment's pause followed on his words. Mrs. Romayne was sweeping the room with her eye-glasses. The hand which held them shook a little, and, if the man beside her could have known it, she saw absolutely nothing.

"Maud Pomeroy!" she said at last, and she seemed to be unconscious of that moment's interval of silence. "Ah! Well, to tell you the truth, that is not such an extraordinary report, though it hardly represents the fact—at present. Young people will be young people, you know, and they must be allowed their little wilfulnesses!"

She also had lowered her voice, though it was high-pitched and strained, and

her speech was almost exaggeratedly confidential. Influenced by the tone into which they had thus fallen Falconer said meaningly and not unkindly :

" You have had to make no more serious allowances, I hope—since ? "

With a laugh so light and high as to be painfully out of tune, Mrs. Romayne answered him gaily in the negative. One little peccadillo, she said, was not such a very terrible thing in a young man's record, and she was charmed to say that with that little affair of which they both knew her anxieties on Julian's account had begun and ended. She held out her hand to Falconer as she finished her assurance, parting with him with her brightest air of society friendliness, and as he wished her good-bye, looking down into the trivial vivacity of her face, Falconer felt himself stirred for the first time by a certain touch of pity for her. Coming upon his softer mood and the comparatively friendly nature of their talk, the eager assurance with which she spoke struck him as being not without pathos. He had no confidence in Julian, and it occurred to him vaguely and with a sense of surprise that if the security so superficially founded should prove false, the blow would be somewhat disproportionate to the lightness of the nature on which it must fall. The next instant he recollects how largely her own actions would have contributed to bring about the blow, and he dismissed her sternly from his thoughts as she passed out of the room.

Mrs. Romayne went straight home, though she had numerous calls on her list for the afternoon ; her eyes were even desperately bright and defiant ; and that same evening Marston Loring received a note asking him to come and see her on the following day.

He found her waiting for him in the drawing-room at the hour she had appointed, and she plunged into the matter in hand with an affectation of spontaneous confidence which was most effective ; not only effective in itself, perhaps, but as a mask.

She had sent for him in his capacity of fellow-conspirator, she told him ; she was in a little perplexity and she was turning to him, as usual—this with a charming smile—to help her. From this prelude she went on to speak of the strange change which had come about in the relations between herself and Julian on the one hand, and the Pomeroy's on

the other. Loring's keen eyes had detected this change some time since—by this time, indeed, it was being whispered about somewhat freely—but he only listened with grave attention. The upshot of her speech was : did Loring know anything about it ? Had Julian said anything ? Had he spoken of any quarrel, of any misunderstanding ? Had his friend any kind of clue to give her as to his feelings on the subject ?

The artificial ease and gaiety of her manner which strove to give to the whole thing something the air of a joke, was disturbed and broken as she came to the point by a strange excitement about which there was nothing gay or light. And some uncertainty as to how far she had gone seemed to pervade her mind and to produce a feeling that some kind of explanation was necessary.

" You see," she said, " it isn't always safe to go to the fountain-head in these little matters ! A young man doesn't always care to be questioned by his mother ! One might ' give offence,' you know ! " Her tone was playful, but her eyes were filled with the nervous fear which lurked in them so often when she and Julian were alone together, and the look on her face as she spoke her last words seemed to give to that fear a definite object. It was the fear of " giving offence " to her son.

Loring put the explanation aside with a smile, but he had no words of enlightenment for her. Julian, he said, had preserved a total silence on the subject.

" I will see what I can do," he said finally, with a smile that cancelled the offensiveness of the intention conveyed of " pumping " his friend. " And we will confer further. Meanwhile, I know you will like to hear that his financial proceedings are prospering exceedingly, and are discretion itself ! "

But the further conference, which took place in a day or two, was entirely fruitless as far as its nominal purpose was concerned. Loring did not reveal to Mrs. Romayne the exceeding brevity and decision with which Julian had dealt with any and every attempt to lead the conversation towards the Pomeroy's, but he gave her to understand that at present he had nothing to tell her.

One night, about a week later, when she and her son came home in the dawn of the July day from a series of " at homes," Mrs. Romayne, instead of saying good night to Julian at the door of

her room, as was her custom, laid her hand suddenly on his arm and drew him just across the threshold. Her face was white to the very lips, and there was a set desperation in it stronger even than the fear with which her eyes were full. Her voice, as she spoke, was breathless and uncertain as though her heart beat with painful rapidity.

"Julian," she said, "what is it that has gone wrong between you and Maud Pomeroy?"

A flash, so quick in the passing that its intense bitterness was not to be detected, passed across Julian's face; it seemed to leave him armed with an expression of determined brightness which defied all emotion or sentiment.

"I don't know that anything has 'gone wrong,' dear," he said lightly.

His mother's hold on his arm tightened desperately.

"I saw what happened to-night in the supper-room," she said. "Won't you"—her voice broke, and there came to it a strangely beseeching note—"won't you tell me what it is?"

Julian's face grew rather set, and he paused a moment. Then he said, still in the same tone:

"It is nothing that I need worry you about, dear."

"Something might be done. If I knew what it was it could be set right, I know."

"No, dear!" The words came from Julian quickly and instantly, and there was a decision and significance behind his light tone now. Her speech had created a necessity, and he rose instinctively to meet it. "I'm awfully sorry to distress you, but I assure you nothing can be done. A girl must be allowed to know her own mind, you know. And a certain little question asked and answered, the only thing left to the fellow is to retire gracefully. I'm awfully sorry you are cut up about it; I was afraid you would be. Never mind, dear. I'm in no particular hurry."

He had gained in fluency and expansiveness of manner as he proceeded; the expedient had only occurred to him on the spur of the moment; and as he finished he bent down and kissed her lightly on the forehead.

"Good night," he said. "Sleep as well as I intend to do."

He left her with a nod and a smile, shutting the door behind him, and Mrs. Romayne stood for a moment motionless,

as she had received his kiss, staring at the door through which he had disappeared. Then she began to rub her hands feebly against one another as though a great cold had seized her. She was trembling from head to foot.

"Failed!"

She spoke the word half aloud in a low, shivering tone, which gave to its isolated utterance a strangely weird effect.

CONCERNING SOFAS.

WE entertain a tolerably well-grounded suspicion that Mr. William Cowper's poem of "The Task" belongs to the category of books which are talked about more than they are read. It may be news, therefore, to some of our readers that its composition was enjoined upon him by his friend Lady Austen, and that she it was who directly suggested the theme of the first book, or canto. She had frequently urged him to try his powers in blank verse; and, after repeated solicitations, he promised compliance if she would furnish him with a subject. "Subject!" she cried; "oh, you can never be in want of a subject! Write upon any; write upon this sofa." He took the hint, and the subject, and wrote in strong and manly lines upon the sofa. Now, we can imagine the disdain with which our latter-day poets, who are never contented unless they are losing themselves in dreams of the mythological past or anticipations of an impossible future, would receive a command or an entreaty to dedicate their muse to a topic so realistic and commonplace. But, wiser than they, the poet of Olney at once perceived that Lady Austen had set him a subject which, as Dr. Johnson said of Mr. Thrale's brewery, had a "potentality" of wealth in it, from its intimate connection with the comfort and happiness of the race.

So Cowper wrote, and wrote well, upon the sofa; not in ballade, rondeau, or triplet, but in good sound decasyllabic blank verse, as Milton had done when he sang of "Paradise Lost," and Ambrose Phillips when he celebrated the virtues of "Cider." He traced its developement, after a fashion not unworthy of a Darwin or a Wallace, from the three-legged stool which probably served King Alfred as a throne—through the successive stages of the four-legged stool; the cane-chair, stiff and upright; the elbow-chair, invented, no

doubt, by some fat monk, burly and big, and studious of his ease; and the soft settee, devised, we may assume, for the special convenience of a Strephon and his Delia, on the principle that "two are company, and three are none"—to the luxurious and all-indulgent sofa, which so happily provided for the relaxation of the languid frame and the soft recumbency of outstretched limbs. Having done justice to this process of evolution, and its felicitous outcome, he broke out into a strain of rapturous eulogium, protesting that sweet and sound as might be the midnight sleep of the hired nurse, like Mrs. Gamp's in the bedroom of the sick Chuzzlewit, or of the weary coachman when waiting for his lady at the opera, or of the curate in his desk with the tedious rector drawling over his head, it was not so sweet and sound as the poet's repose on his luxurious sofa.

Who was the inventor of the sofa? History, which records so many names of less importance, has neglected to procure that of a man whom posterity would have delighted to have honoured as a benefactor of his race. No doubt the idea of it came from the East, where, from time immemorial, princes and potentates, sheikhs and ameers, have passed their idle hours—of which they seem always to have had an ample supply at their disposal—on the soft and yielding cushions of the divan. They have received ambassadors, entertained guests, administered justice, declared war, and made peace, reclining easily or sitting cross-legged on the purple musnid, or seat of honour. So says the poet Moore: "Upon his couch the veiled Mokanna lay." They had their so-called thrones—some of these Powers of the East—such as the Peacock Throne of Delhi, and that more wonderful structure, the Firozeh, or Cerulean Throne of the Deccan, which, according to Ferishta, was nine feet long and three feet broad, made of ebony, covered with plates of pure gold, and crusted with precious stones of fabulous value—a throne fit for an Emperor. But the customary seat of Royalty was the musnid. The Spanish ambassadors who visited the Court of the famous Timur speak of him as seated upon gold-embroidered cushions of great costliness, and it is to something of the kind that quaint old Knolles refers when he describes "Selymus the Second" as "sitting upon a pallet, which the Turks call mastabe, used by them in their chambers to sleep and to feed upon,

covered with carpets of silk." The Turks, as we know, carried their divans and their cushions to Constantinople, and thence they passed onward to Paris, where some ingenious upholsterer placed the divan or framework upon legs, furnished it with a back and arms, and mounted the whole upon castors, so that, unlike the Oriental original, which was built up against the wall, it could be moved from place to place. This was the genesis of the sofa, which we do not hear of, we think, before the Louis Quatorze age.

We venture to suppose that it made its way about the same time to the Court of Charles the Second, for the couch, of which we read in the pages of the Elizabethan dramatists, must not be confounded with the sofa. It was soon naturalised, as it were, in "the stately homes of England." By the time that the House of Hanover had taken possession of the Crown, it was recognised as an article of furniture indispensable to every well-to-do family. We can fancy Swift's "Vanessa," or Steele's "dearest Prue," or the lovely Mary Lepel, or the fair Bellenden reclining in graceful ease on the sofa, in an attitude ingeniously contrived to do justice to a well-proportioned figure and expose just a modest glimpse of a well-shaped ankle. Room would be found for a favoured swain, perhaps, who, thrown back in a cosy corner, would hardly be less solicitous than the lady to show off the graces of his person. It is clear, indeed, that if the sofa had not occupied a prominent place in society, Lady Austen would never have proposed to Cowper to write a poem upon it.

In those days, however, it could not be overlooked; a cumbersome structure, it could be accommodated only in the reception chambers of the mansions of the gentry, for the eighteenth century sofa, like the eighteenth century bed, was of Brobdingnagian dimensions, as beseeemed a structure dedicated to the hoops of fine ladies and the square-cut coats and ruffles of fine gentlemen. Numerous allusions occur to it in the pages of Fielding and Madame d'Arblay, and from these its generous size can readily be inferred. But, by degrees, a lighter and handsomer article superseded the sofa in aristocratic interiors—a dainty affair, radiant with velvet, silk, or damask—which assumed the designation of couch, ottoman, or settee, according to circumstances. The sofa then became the property of the middle

class ; and it is curious to observe how completely it is now banished from the pages of our fashionable novelists. No one can imagine Ouida's heroes or heroines taking their rest upon anything less distinguished than a couch. They may recline on an ottoman, or enjoy a tête-à-tête on a settee, but to deposit their beauty or their bravery on the democratic sofa—the sort of thing which you see in the front parlours of six-roomed suburban villas—is plainly impossible. Whether it is known in the show-rooms of West End upholsterers we are by no means certain. A specimen or two may possibly be kept for the convenience of customers with old-fashioned tastes ; and this, we should imagine, is about all. For ourselves, we have not the least doubt that the plebeian sofa is a very much more comfortable affair than the fashionable couch, but we are constrained to admit that its popularity has departed, and that no Lady Austen nowadays would ask a poet to celebrate it in blank or any other verse.

IN LONDON : AND OUT OF IT.

PART II. IN IT.

WE are told that London is the rich man's paradise. So it is, in the sense in which the whole world is the rich man's paradise. But, comparatively ? Hardly. London is not in so peculiar a degree the rich man's paradise as the country is. The moneyed man in the country takes standing with the gods. He is a being set apart. He is hedged about with the divinity which, theoretically, surrounds a King. He dispenses the law ; and, not seldom, he is above the law. He is a power in all the countryside. It is as good as a course of lessons in human nature to see the fuss which is made over a local great man at, say, a country railway station. He condescends to let the officials know that he is coming. The station-master receives him with his hat in his hand. Every soul about the premises is anxious to be before his fellows in giving him reverential salutation. For the time being there is no one in the station but that great man. If you, being an innocent, unoffending stranger, stand staring, wondering what is all at once the matter, "Now, sir, if you please. Make room for Sir Aaron Moses !" In the country it is only the rich man who goes dryshod in dirty weather. It is only the rich man who can move about at his

ease in all weathers and at all hours of the night. It is only the rich man who can enjoy the pleasures which the country has to offer. It is only the rich man who can eat what he pleases. It is only the rich man who ever has a chance of relieving that hideous monotony which is the yokel's hardest heritage.

In the country the poor man is bound. In London he is free ; there is no street he may not tread ; there is no form of enjoyment he may not share. In public places he is the equal of the millionaire. He must be a poor man indeed if, in dirty weather, he cannot ride in carriages. For a few coppers he can ride anywhere and everywhere. He is as well off, as regards means of locomotion, as the man who spends a thousand pounds a year upon his stable. The pleasures of the palate are not cut off from him. He is not restricted in his choice of foods. All the produce of all the seas and countries of the earth is offered in the London streets, in good condition, and at prices which bring it within the reach of all but the pauper. The artisan has the choice of innumerable dining-rooms, in which a constant variety of well-cooked meats and vegetables may be obtained for sums which are well within his means. There is, in London, no hour of the day or night in which he cannot obtain something to eat or drink, and something which is just the thing he wants. As for the poor man who, in social position, is supposed to be just above the artisan, for a shilling he can have a sumptuous hot dinner every day of his life ; and he has his choice of ten or a dozen dishes every time he sits at table. He is always welcome, every whit as welcome as the millionaire, and he receives exactly the same treatment which would be meted out to Sir Aaron Moses, if Sir Aaron Moses were to take it into his head to dine for a shilling.

Palaces are kept up in London, not only not especially for the rich man, but for the poor man first of all. To how many places of free public resort is he invited—an invitation of which he, very rightly, does not scruple to avail himself whenever he is in the mood. Think of the constantly increasing number of free libraries, of art galleries, of museums, of recreation grounds, in which he is solicited to make himself at home. He gets there, for nothing, what he could not get in the country in exchange for the whole earnings of his life. It is getting to be more and more

understood that a great city is, practically, an aggregation of poor men, and that, therefore, it behoves a great city, before all the other portions of the world, to be the poor man's paradise.

A poor man need know no monotony in London, and to realise what that means it is necessary to know something of that outer darkness of monotony which imbrutes the countryman. A bewildering variety of entertainment is offered to him on every hand. For nothing at all, or in exchange for the most trivial sums, he can become acquainted with all art, and science, and literature. He can listen to the best of music—and the worst.

But his perennial, and his cheapest, and perhaps his best entertainment may be derived from the mere presence of the great city itself. Few of the wise men seem to realise—is it because they themselves have none of them ever been poor?—what a happy hunting-ground to the poor man are the London streets. They are always with him, and, though he may not put his thanks into concrete form, he still is thankful that they are. They are all in all to him; they are much more to him, for instance, than the countryside is to the countryman. And there is a reason why this should be so. That reason is, that not only the proper, but the most engrossing, study of mankind is not inanimate nature, but man. Rich folks meet each other in each other's drawing-rooms. Society is all the world to them, and society is a good part of the world to the poor man, too; only his drawing-room is the London streets, and I am not sure that his drawing-room is not almost as good an one as the rich man's. At any rate, it serves his purpose quite as well.

Many well-intentioned people seem to think that it is unbecoming for a man or a woman to what they call "hang about" the streets. I have been more than once at a loss to quite grasp their meaning. They sometimes go so far as to declare that it is not respectable. Well, that depends. It depends, I conceive, a good deal upon what one hangs about the streets for. There are a good many people, for instance, who "hang about" the streets for pretty much the same reason for which their richer brothers and sisters, at certain hours, "hang about" Rotten Row. Why is one a sinner in the one case rather than in the other? Some one replies: "Think of the bad characters who do frequent the streets!" If we are to keep away from all

the places which are frequented by bad characters, we counsellors of perfection had better at once "make tracks," say, to Mars! Are there no bad characters in Rotten Row, I wonder?

Says one body of censors of other people's manners and other people's morals: "It may be all very well to frequent the streets in the daytime, but—after dark? Ought a respectable man or woman to frequent the streets at night?" There is one sufficiently obvious answer to such a question. If people were only to frequent the streets in the daytime, an enormous number of Londoners would, practically, never be able to set foot in them at all. Most people in London are at work all day. Their only chance to take their pleasure is at night. To attempt, on any plea whatever, to keep these people out of the streets at the only time at which they can get into them would be to attempt to perpetrate an act of criminal selfishness, of which we can only hope few persons would be willing to be guilty.

But, continue the censors, think of the promiscuous acquaintances which are made! People who talk like this are either oblivious, or ignorant, of the fact that all men and women are not run into the same mould. A promiscuous acquaintance is, roughly speaking, an acquaintance made haphazard. A good many of us can look back, and say, unhesitatingly, that some of our pleasantest acquaintances have been made haphazard.

It is curious how ignorant one set of people, at least, appear to be of the conditions under which another set of people live. Hosts of young men in London would never have an opportunity of knowing a young woman at all if it were not for the promiscuous acquaintances which they are, I venture to say, fortunately able to make with them in the streets. And the same thing applies to multitudes of young women—if they had to wait for social introductions they never would know a young man. What chance have the generality of clerks, and shop assistants, and such like of getting into any sort of society? You say, that with such persons, there ought to be no intercourse between the sexes; that, while they occupy such positions, they ought not to think of marriage. But they never will rise, appreciably, above the positions which they are occupying now. That is not their fault. It is certain, as a rule, that it is

not their fault—fate and circumstances, all the conditions of their life are against them. And, on that account, because of their poverty, are they not amenable to the laws which govern our common nature? Are they not to enjoy the pleasures which, because of their position, are perhaps the only pleasures they can enjoy? If you think so, we are not likely to agree. Because, in spite of the wise men and of the political economists, I see no reason, but very much the contrary, why the poor man and woman should not get as much pleasure out of life as the rich man and woman—if they can. At any rate, they have my heartiest wishes for the success of their attempts to do so.

I love the London streets, and, perhaps, pre-eminently at night. There is, for me, a magic in the London streets at night which you shall scarcely meet elsewhere. I have wandered, many and many a time, to and fro in them, from west to east, from north to south. There is a something in the air, which has nothing to do with the chemical constituents of the actual atmosphere, which, in certain moods, acts upon the blood in one's veins like wine. This is not a fancy, which is peculiar to an individual. I have been told the same thing, over and over again, by men and by women too. Is it strange that the rustic, fresh from the gloom and monotony of his native village, when he begins to realise the presence of this something in the London streets at nights, finds that it entrals him as with the glamour of some supposititious fairyland? Have you known many country folks, out of the books and the plays, who, after once knowing, really knowing London, were willing to return—for good, as they have it—to their villages? I, personally, cannot recall a single case. But I have known, and do know, country folks who would not return from whence they came for a good deal more than I am likely to be able to offer them. Ask ninety-nine country wenches out of a hundred, who have known service in town, to accept a permanent place in the country, and "make a note" of their answers.

It is not suggested that the poor man's life, in London, is without its seamy side; that it is all "beer and skittles"; that it knows no "kicks"; that it is all "half-pence." One is merely expressing a modest, but, I believe, well-founded opinion, that the poor man is better off in the town than in the country; that it

is by no means surprising that, as the statisticians inform us, able-bodied rustics, of both sexes, are deserting their native hamlets to try their fortune in the cities.

A poor man is not very well off anywhere. That, as things are, is one of the conditions of his poverty. It may be different later on in the new world which, according to some prophets, is coming by-and-by. But the millennium is not yet, nor, to the ordinary vision, are there many signs of its approach visible on the horizon. But, bearing this in mind—that a poor man is not very well off anywhere, I should like to be told, definitely, in what respect he is not, at least, as well off in London as out of it.

It is true enough that, in certain districts of the metropolis, he is housed in a manner which is a disgrace to our so-called modern civilisation. The slums of London are our perpetual shame. But does any one suppose that there are no slums in the country? I doubt if there is a village in England which cannot show sights of that sort equal to anything which can be seen in town. What do you say to hovels built on the edge of a fetid pond which is always giving off foul miasmic vapours, and which in winter overflows its banks, and covers the floors of the human pigsties—the floors of the rooms in which human beings sleep!—with oozy, stinking mud? What do you say to farmhouses—what pictures the mention of farmhouses is apt to conjure up to the imaginative vision of a Londoner, pictures, too often, how bitterly unlike the unsavoury reality!—I ask, what do you say to wooden-built, ramshackle, tumbledown farmhouses standing in the middle of a muck-yard—a muck-yard which, at any season of the year, renders it impossible to approach the house dry-shod, and which, for perhaps six months of the year, causes the house to be surrounded by an evil-smelling morass? I know London as well as most men. I know some of its salubrious neighbourhoods—Strutton Ground, Lower Marsh, the slums about Drury Lane, the Mint, Houndsditch, Shoreditch, a dozen other districts, the very names of which are nightmares. But I know nothing in London, in the shape of housing for the poor, which is worse than some of the "housing" which I know in the country. In London the poor folk can find other quarters—and they do. In the country they, practically, cannot. They live and die in the dirty den in which they struggled into life. There

is nowhere else they can go to, except the "house," or unless they are wise in their generation, and turn their backs upon the country and journey to the town. In London, again, sanitary inspection is not a dead letter. In the country it too often is. The rich men, on whose properties the poor folks' dwellings are apt to stand, are our magistrates and rulers. Sanitary inspectors know their duty too well to interfere with them. In London, still once more, there is a great and general movement which all men are endeavouring to help forward, for the better and more convenient housing of the poor, and they are being housed better and better every day. If any such general movement is taking place in the country, it is strange that, up to the present, the secret has been so well kept from the world.

Certainly rents are higher in the town than in the country, but, then, so are wages. I wonder what able-bodied labourer in London, skilled or unskilled, is content to put in a full week's work for anything like twelve shillings? If the London labourer were disposed to live as the country labourer lives, I am inclined to think that he could do it every bit as cheaply. But he is not so disposed. If the city workman in full work were often to go without meat for his dinner, his wage being such as to render it impossible for him to purchase it, I fancy that it would soon be mentioned in the papers. Mr. Burns, and Mr. Mann, and Mr. Tillett, and the rest of the wise would soon raise a storm about our heads. Compared with the agricultural labourer, the metropolitan artisan fares sumptuously every day of his life, and he is better off in the end, in spite of it. It is not the rule, with him, to finish his days in the workhouse. It is the rule with the agricultural labourer.

The townsman has all the world in front of him. It would be nonsense to say that he can be what he pleases—despite the teachers of the doctrine of "Self-Help"—but he has a chance of becoming better off than he is. Hodge has no such chance—while he continues to be Hodge. He is just as much a member of a caste as any Hindoo, and he has no chance of rising out of that caste—practically the lowest caste of all the castes—unless he cuts the Gordian knot and goes to try his fortune in a town.

One hears a good deal about the "temptations" of a great city. Of course there are temptations in a great city. But some people seem to be unaware that there also

are temptations out of it. I was talking, recently, to a friend, who has been residing for some time in a north country village, about the comparative amount of vice to be found in the country and in towns. He made the startling statement that, to the best of his belief, there was not a young woman of marriageable age in that north country village who had not had an illegitimate child. I say that that was a startling statement. But undoubtedly that particular form of human frailty is unpleasantly conspicuous in not a few of the most secluded hamlets.

There is another sort of temptation which some people seem to think exists only in cities—the temptation of drunkenness. Such people are the victims of an extraordinary delusion. In nine villages out of ten that is the only sort of amusement which the majority of the inhabitants have. Their one notion of enjoyment is to get drunk. It is not their fault—it is the only description of entertainment which offers. There must be many villages in which every inhabitant, at some period or other of his life, was an habitual drunkard—that is, he got drunk whenever he got the chance. Of what city in the world could you say that? I was once in a village on the Welsh coast. The Welsh, I have been informed, are a sober people, and so some of them may be. A certain wicked traveller chanced to come that way. According to his own account, he had "struck oil" in the Western States of America—and, possibly, he had "struck" some peculiar notions, too. For a whole week he "stood Sam," at the local hostelry, to everybody who chose to come and drink. For a whole week every soul in the place, to all intents and purposes, was drunk—all the men, many of the women, and some of the children. The occasion offered, and they rose to it. They had never before enjoyed themselves so much in their lives—that being their idea of enjoyment. No doubt, to this hour, many of those amusement-seekers look back to that week as being the most amusing week they ever spent. I know, or, rather, I used to know, a village in Devonshire, in which every able-bodied man used to regularly subscribe to a common fund. It was an ancient custom, and, possibly, still survives. To what purpose do you suppose that fund was applied? To making every subscriber—that is, every able-bodied man in the place—drunk, dead drunk, I fancy, but certainly drunk, on

cider, on certain appointed high days and holidays. Talk of the temptation which a great city offers to a countryman to fall into drinking habits! What singular notions some folks seem to have!

The picture is not all shadow in the country, any more than it is all light in town. Men, places, and things, the varying conditions of life, have not only two sides, they have many sides. The point is, that more people are acquainted with the state of things in great cities than with the state of things in rural districts. The reason is obvious. Townspeople are in an enormous majority, and, as a matter of course, they are better acquainted with the conditions which prevail among themselves, than with the conditions which prevail among their more or less distant neighbours. The consequence of this is what might be expected. They know what burdens they have themselves to bear, they know how heavy they are, they know that they show no signs of diminishing either in quantity or in quality. It seems strange to them that others should be willing, nay, anxious, to take these burdens on themselves. They do not seem to suspect that those others may be staggering under even heavier loads than they themselves. They see the country, when they see it at all, under the pleasantest conditions, and they only see its pleasantest aspects. The countryman is apt never to see these pleasantest aspects at all. First, because familiarity breeds contempt. How is it that Londoners see nothing in some of those aspects of the great city which fill the rustic with speechless admiration? Is it because an essential constituent of admiration is the element of novelty, surprise? And, second, the country is at its best—from the townsman's point of view—for so brief a season; while the hardships of his lot are with the countryman year in and year out, from the rising up to the going down of the sun; ay, and, too often, in the weary watches of his night to boot.

One may be excused for wishing that those gentlemen, who, on the platform and in print, are in the habit of deplored what they call the rural exodus, would fill, at least for a time, the places which once were filled by those wanderers in search of a promised land. Why should a man, who is at his ease amidst the luxuries and conveniences of a great city, reproach his brother for disliking to be uneasy amidst the hardships and inconveniences of a

rural district? It is easy to say that there must be agricultural labourers. Let those who say so prove the faith that is in them by becoming agricultural labourers themselves. But do not let them put pressure upon others to exemplify that faith vicariously. It may be true that England, without agriculture, would fade into nothingness. But I have my doubts, and I am certain that no country can be said to be holding its own, if, to enable it to do so, it is absolutely necessary that a large portion of its population shall live the lives which agricultural labourers in England live to-day.

If agricultural labourers choose to continue to be agricultural labourers, so be it. But if you wish them to make that choice, you will have to do, at least, one thing—you will have to confine education to the towns. That is the cause of all the change—education. The fathers and the mothers are rooted to the soil. The sons and the daughters are not yet rooted. You are teaching them what being rooted to the soil means. You are also teaching them that they have a choice in the matter; and though, probably, many of them are conscious that it is only between two evils, they are disposed to choose what seems to them, as it appears to me, for sufficient reasons, to be the lesser.

England has seen many prophets of disaster. Yet she is England still. Not impossibly she may continue to be England, little great England, yet a little longer. Even though the countryfolk continue to desert the rural districts in ever-increasing numbers, and the agricultural problem assumes a phase which England, as a nation, shall be constrained to gird up her loins and face—as she has faced problems every whit as difficult before to-day. When that time comes, I doubt if any one will be found who will be willing to maintain that a man ought to be content to work, at the most arduous labour, in exchange for his bare daily bread, his whole life long, and then that his last words ought to be an expression of gratitude to his country, as, cut off from the woman who shared his sorrows—he had no joys!—he dies in the workhouse at the end.

WHERE DENMARK'S KINGS LIE.

THE Cathedral of Roeskilde in Zealand, about seventeen miles west of Copenhagen, is the Westminster Abbey of Denmark.

At least, it is so inasmuch as it holds the dust of most of the more recent monarchs of Denmark and Scandinavia—when the North was, as seems fit, a united kingdom—with that of their wives and children. Of the national heroes it has no such record as our precious Abbey. In so far, therefore, it makes but a limited appeal to our sensibilities. Kings and Queens are not in themselves very impressive objects: their dust—unless in life they were exceptional beings—stimulates to reflection much less than the ornate caskets of silver, copper, and other decorated material which holds it.

In summer Roeskilde must be a charming little town. It stands on a knoll at the head of a branch of the Isse Fiord. The Cathedral occupies the very crest of the hill. From it you look north immediately upon the arm of the sea, though between it and the actual shore are trees and snug villas of fretted woodwork, with fantastic gables such as the Danes love to give their houses when they can afford to let their imagination take its fling in such a matter. East and south the town spreads from the red Cathedral walls. You may find some old houses among its streets, but scarcely as many as you would expect when you know that the Cathedral was founded by Harald Blaatand so long ago as 975. By the way, this monarch's frescoed portraiture is to be seen on one of the Cathedral choir walls. The Englishman is quick to notice that though he is not depicted as a very mighty man, he is styled "Rex Danie Anglie et Norwegie." Things have, however, changed a good deal during the thousand years since King Harald could claim so substantial a kingdom.

But I did not come to Roeskilde in summer. It was midwinter when I found my way to the "Hotel Prindsen." Travelling was distinctly tiresome. I had purposed arriving at Roeskilde at the decent hour of four or five in the afternoon—at least, so the time-tables promised me. That, however, was out of the question. I was west of the Belts when I set my face towards the cathedral city, and the Belts were frightfully congested—with ice. The consequence was this: instead of sending five or six ferry-boats daily across the fifteen miles of the Great Belt Channel, the railway companies had much ado to get the boats to cross once daily in each direction. We travellers amassed on each side of the

channel in various degrees of impatience, and even resentment. It seemed absurd that on the threshold of the twentieth century ice should be allowed to interfere with the mails. Yet interfere it did, very effectually. I for my part shall, for a good decade or two, remember the tussle the boat had with the floes and the vast reaches of solid ice which it behoved us to attack and crash through. There were times when it seemed impossible that we should succeed in our little enterprise. That was when we came to a dead standstill in the middle of the white field, and the engines for a while held their peace. It was a thick night at the time—black as the forebodings of the more nervous of the passengers. Every one of sense knew full well that any considerable pause in our struggle might prove fatal. It would give time for the ice to pack irresistibly about the boat, and freeze about it too. We did not therefore like these halts. They were worse than the constant orders of "Full speed astern," which were necessary to gain for us an adequate impulse after even a momentary check. Nor was the evident excitement of our captain and his henchmen calculated to compose us. However, all ended well, and we reached the eastern side of the B.^t It tolerably comforted.

This was at the hideous time of half an hour after midnight. My ticket to Roeskilde would, under these circumstances, bring me to the cathedral city at about half-past two in the morning. In effect it did so. I left the train, confabulated with the drowsy station-master, who assured me that the hotels were all fast asleep, reminded me of what I needed no reminder—to wit, that there were about thirty degrees of frost in the air—and suggested that I should journey on to Copenhagen and later return to Roeskilde.

This advice was sound. I spent the brief residue of the night in the capital, indulged myself with an hour or two of high entertainment among Thorvaldsen's matchless statuary, and came back to Roeskilde in the evening. To my joy, the head - waiter at the "Hotel Prindsen" talked excellent English.

It was uncommonly cold in Roeskilde that night. I primed myself for the endurance of it with a mixture of coffee and gin, which seemed to be in request among my neighbours in the café of the hotel. I do not recommend this beverage.

It may suit the Danes, but to the stranger it is scarcely nectar. Perhaps it does not really suit the Danes, for I remarked over my cigar that a very spruce, short, fat gentleman in a frock-coat, who was discussing the Schleswig Holstein question with a slim, angular young gentleman, grew almost intolerantly heated as he sipped at his cup. His interlocutor, who was satisfied with some mild lager beer, seemed to have much the better of the argument—and did not get red in the face.

Still, I repeat, it may be an aid to slumber and warmth, and therefore must not be vituperated. I was comfortable enough under my feather-bed—which the English-speaking waiter had arranged should be fully two feet longer than the average—and awoke refreshed, and—save the tip of my nose—divinely warm. The maid who came in to light the stove exclaimed something violent about "degrees" the moment she entered. I did not altogether understand her at the time. Later I learned from other mouths that the thermometer had made a phenomenal descent in the night, and obstinately refused to rise. I had an inkling of the state of things, however, when, looking from my bedroom window, I saw the Roeskilde boys and girls trotting to school with apple-red cheeks, holding their hands to their ears. This latter is a sure sign of unusual cold in Denmark.

It chanced to be market-day in the town. Sledge followed sledge up the street, with bales of animated clothing and furs in its midst. It was a pretty scene. The snow lay deep in the thoroughfares and on the roofs, and overhead the sky was a clear, pale, piercing blue. The blood-red colour of the Cathedral, early Gothic in style and of brick material, with its adjacent trees all heavily frosted, and the great white reach of the frozen fiord beyond, added to the pictorial beauty of the place. I had heard the Cathedral bells in the frosty night once, and their mellow harmony had excited expectation. This expectation did not, upon first actual acquaintance, seem justified. You do not look to see an aged church like this glowing with youthful fervour. Red-brick spires to us at home do not sound attractive. But of course the apparent anomaly was readily explainable. The Cathedral of Roeskilde has been profoundly restored. It has plenty of the dry bones of antiquity inside it. They are, however, alluringly dissembled under a

fair and fervid exterior. The Danes cannot be said to be a people very enthusiastic about religious matters or religious buildings. Their Lutheranism seems to make them not so much iconoclastic as indifferent. In no country in Europe, I suppose, have our modern, world-wide, evangelising revivalists such difficulties to face ere they can hope to make an impression. This being so, some credit is due to Denmark for the sacrifice which has enabled the country to make Roeskilde, the national church, so presentable.

The snow lay in deep drifts against all the red buttresses and the doors of the building. I walked round the exterior twice. My Kodak had designs upon its beauty. But the air was so keen and the wind from the fiord so penetrating that I could not satisfy myself in this particular; my fingers became instantly numb when I withdrew them from my pocket. I did, however, capture the towering façade, by sliding down a pretty lane at right angles to it, bordered with winsome bijou villas and terminating in a holy well dedicated to an unfamiliar saint. This done, I called upon Mr. Deputy-Gravedigger Smith, as I had been instructed, and in his agreeable parlour—containing as many homely nick-nacks as a bazaar—arranged to be personally conducted about Denmark's Royal mausoleum. I have, here and there, clashed with guides innumerable. Mr. Deputy-Gravedigger Smith seems to me as much above them all as the Eiffel Tower is above the rest of Parisian edifices. I never hope to meet with a more gentle, graceful, courtly, and obliging old man. In my mind he will be ever associated with this Cathedral. Long may he live, apple-cheeked old septuagenarian that he is, to tell the tales about his Royal dead charges which he has so entirely at his fingers' ends.

The old gentleman was soon muffled in a comforter by his daughter, and, taking the keys, he led me into the Cathedral. Here he prattled unceasingly while he was with me in a quaint and not wholly unintelligible mixture of Danish, English, and German. But he had such confidence in me—or perhaps wearied so much of my prolonged examination of the building—that four times he left me to myself and the Royal coffins in the Royal chapel. He made flying visits to his home and returned after each visit with an agreeable odour of strong drink about him. After each visit his volubility seemed increased, and the

anecdotes tripped off his tongue with a speed which was only bridled by the insufferable necessity of being as polyglot as possible.

The church is not large, but it is trim and bright, and in strong contrast to the massive character of so many of our British cathedrals. If it be comparable in its decorative work to any of our cathedrals, Ely may be mentioned as the one most suggestive of it. Ely, however, is infinitely more grandiose, not only in its architecture, but also in its colouring. Still, there is much that is winsome in Roeskilde's interior, and the gleam of the winter's sun, that cast a mosaic of variegated light on the pavement by the altar on this particular day, gave special grace to it. But it was very cold in the place. Old Smith did not unmuffle inside the church, nor even doff his hat. Even when leaning against the stately coffins of Denmark's dead monarchs, the old fellow showed little awe of them. He described them and their contents with the pride of a man expatiating about his orchids, and with something of the fondness also.

It is these tombs that make Roeskilde unique. There are three chief mortuary chapels, each containing a succession of monarchs and their wives. In the chancel are other monuments—that to the great Queen Margaret, who united the three realms of Scandinavia, being, of course, the most significant. This notable lady died in 1412, and was at first buried in the old Royal sepulchre church of Sorö. Roeskilde, however, claimed her a year later, and the Bishop supported his claim by seizing the Royal corpse, and taking it by force to his Cathedral. Close to the tomb is the singularly beautiful monument to her son Eric, who died prematurely. The lad is done in white marble, in knightly attire, recumbent on the flat headstone.

Beneath the choir is a grim, dark crypt containing a dozen or more coffins, great and small, sombrely wrapped for the most part in faded black velvet. "They come here," remarked my old custodian, "when they have nowhere else to go." Most of these desolate and compassionate dead belong to the last century—stillborn and young members of the reigning families. One does not like to think of them in this dusty cellar of death, lumbered together like a man's disused trunks and packing-cases.

To go hence into one of the three great mortuary chapels is like going from a young blighted rose-tree to a vase of

superb cut flowers. The most recent of the chapels is really the least interesting. Its Byzantine style and its speckless walls of whitewash do not harmonise with the rest of the Cathedral. The chapel contains about a century's growth of sovereigns and their queens in marble mausoleums, and standing nakedly in the glittering pomp of crimson velvet and silver. Here lies Frederick the Seventh, with a golden laurel-wreath on his coffin; and here may be seen the mementoes of affection sent but the other day by members of the reigning family to be placed over the remains of their loved ones, recently dead. Hither will come King Christian the Ninth and his Queen when their earthly career is over. It is impossible not to be reflective in a place like this. But dear old Deputy-Gravedigger Smith, with his soothing prattle and his kindly smile, seemed to take much of the sting from death itself as he laid his cleanly-wrinkled hand first on one coffin and then another, and told his tale. I should not like to say at how many of these more modern interments he had officially assisted.

The Chapel of the Three Kings adjacent is of a very different order. Here one can dispense with funereal moralising, for these dead have been so long dead that sympathy with them or their relatives is out of the question. The chapel walls are brilliantly frescoed, and the storied marbles they surround appeal to us as so many works of art. The tomb of Christian the Third in particular is a magnificent achievement. But one is most drawn to the simple brown slab in the floor upon which the words "Christian Rex" may be read, denoting the resting-place of the monarch who was great in more senses than one. He was, until his disinterment a decade or two ago, believed to have been of fabulous size. Old Smith has much to say on this subject. He was present at this interesting scene. The bones were certainly those of a very tall man, though perhaps scarcely answerable to the height given him by the marking on the pillar in the chapel—said to have been done by the King himself. It is curious to see how the existing members of the Royal family have also marked their heights on this famous pillar, though none of them approach the first Christian's eight-foot line. Peter the Great in his day came here and stood against the stone; but Peter again was some five inches shorter than Christian.

I really do not know how much of dear

old Smith's tales is strict truth, and how much is an unconscious and loving accretion to a nucleus of fact. But he astonished me with a story of a certain monstrous Irishman named Murphy, who, in 1864, stalked into the Cathedral, and hearing Mr. Smith's story of King Christian's height, exclaimed that King Christian was a child to him. So it seemed, upon measurement. There upon the pillar is Mr. Murphy's mark, a foot or so above Christian the First's line. Old Smith's amazement at this apparition of Mr. Murphy in 1864 had not lessened appreciably by 1893.

From the Chapel of the Three Kings to the Chapel of Christian the Fourth is another change of epochs, with a corresponding change in the garniture of the mortuary chamber. There is magnificence here—in the frescoes and the death-caskets—that recalls the gorgeousness of Versailles and Venice at their most florid epochs. Christian the Fourth was a notable monarch in war as well as in architecture. His sword is on his splendid metallic coffin, tight chained to it. His wife's coffin is on one side of him, and his eldest son keeps him company on the other side.

These are the chief treasures of Roeskilde. There are also a rainbow-hued organ, and gallery for the Royal family, dating from the sixteenth century, and a plain stone—ill-according with the gentleman's exuberance as an author in life—indicating where *Saxo Grammaticus* moulders in peace. Yet, stay; for its sly mirthfulness, the Chapel of Saint Bridget must not be overlooked. The ancient artist who frescoed it has portrayed a most diverting devil in pale green upon its walls. The fiend has long ears, and he is writing down in the register of his clients the names of those who come late to church or gossip therein—"scribo tardanus et vana loquenda vagantes." Beneath him is a long-haired lady, whose office it is, or, rather, was—in the fifteenth century—to punish such persons in this life also. She holds a stout birch of twigs in her hand.

I tarried in the Cathedral for two hours—long enough to exhaust even the Deputy-Gravedigger Smith's patience, had he not been supported by his runs home. Then it behoved me to hurry for the train to Copenhagen.

As I shook my dear old cicerone by the hand he said: "When you come again I shall be like them"—nodding at his kingly

clients. I hope it may not be so; for, interesting as Roeskilde Cathedral is in itself, it will be much less so without its amiable, apple-cheeked old custodian.

AN ANGEL UNAWARES.

A COMPLETE STORY.

MR. BARRADALE SMITH is a man—I beg his pardon, a notable man—of to-day. There can be no doubt about it, because when he proposed to publish in the "Dial" short autobiographies of "Notable Men of To-day," he started the series by writing his own. The second time the "Dial" appeared it contained the reminiscences of Mr. Anstruther Coates, and the third number—but, owing to a misunderstanding with the printer, I fancy there was no third number, or if there was, no notable could be persuaded to tell the story of his life therein.

Mr. Barradale Smith lives in a flat. A very nice flat it is, and a very nice rent he pays for it; but the exact situation of the building containing it cannot, for obvious reasons, be revealed. There are many Barradale Smiths in London; let them dispute in print as to which has the honour of furnishing the model for this sketch.

The flat itself is on the fourth floor. It contains, besides the usual living rooms, a spacious study sacred to the use of Mr. Barradale Smith, and a small den allotted to his wife, who is so far behind the times as to think that a woman who wants to live by her pen must needs spend the best part of the day in actually using it. Her husband has pointed out her mistake times without number. He tells her that she must let herself be seen more; that in these self-advertising days one must keep in the swim; that the name of Barradale Smith must be kept conspicuously before the public in all lists of those who help to bury, or marry, or even divorce a brother or sister celebrity, and that he himself cannot possibly be in two places at once. She only smiles, tells him to attend to his part of the business while she minds hers, and goes on with her writing, which is not turned into print over the name of Barradale Smith at all, but produces cheques almost as large, perhaps, as if it were.

Yet Barradale—how he blessed his sponsors for giving him that name!—is a really brilliant writer when he can be persuaded to write instead of thinking

about it. It is not very hard to persuade him either, if you set the example by writing a cheque yourself, but then he always wants the figure on that cheque to be so large in proportion to the amount of copy he will produce in return, that proprietors of cheque-books and journals often shake their heads and seek a humbler man.

The obvious remedy for such a state of things is to start a journal of your own, and Barradale has started many—so many, in fact, that printers and other base mechanics whose co-operation in the production of journals is a necessary evil, are accustomed to ask him for something in advance, which something is not always forthcoming. It was not forthcoming early in February of the present year, though Barradale had a brilliant idea—which it would be unfair to make public as it has not yet been worked out—for a weekly on entirely new lines.

About four o'clock in the afternoon, there being no function on to which his name would procure admission for himself, or at which his presence would ensure the insertion of his name in the papers, he was sitting in his study smoking and wondering where the capital to start the new venture could be found, when his maid-servant entered with a note.

"And please, sir," she said, "there's a man wants to see you."

"Did the man bring the note?" asked Barradale suspiciously.

There are certain men who want to see Barradale, perhaps because he is such a celebrity, whose curiosity he never gratifies if he can help it.

"No, sir," replied the girl. "He seems a respectable sort of man, sir."

Perhaps her opinion was biased. The man had called her a pretty dear in tones quite sincere and inoffensive.

"But is he a gentleman, or what?" asked Barradale.

His temper was not good when he was worried, and he spoke snappishly.

"I'm sure I don't know, sir," replied the girl pertly. "I don't see enough gentlemen here to be a judge."

"Come, come, Mary," said Barradale soothingly—her wages were overdue, and she was a sharp young woman, who never mistook a lawyer's clerk for a printer's devil—"you know what I mean. Size him up, there's a good girl."

Barradale did not often drop into familiarity, but when he did, he swooped

down gracefully, and the girl was appeased.

"Well, sir," she said, "he's about fifty, or perhaps forty-five." She suddenly remembered the pretty dear, and took off five years. "Wears plaid trousers, a brown hovercoat, and a pot-hat. Might be a countryman up for an 'oliday. I think he's all right, sir."

"Then show him in, Mary," said Barradale, content to rely upon her judgement.

In that household the interests of master and servant are identical, Mary knowing that the more duns she keeps out the better is her own chance of coming in—for her wages.

The man entered, and Barradale, the still-unopened note in his hand, treated him to that stare of curiosity mingled with pity which he kept for people who were not "smart."

"Well, my man," he said languidly, "what can I do for you? I am really very busy, so please—"

"Oh, nothing much, thank you, Scissors," interrupted the visitor. "I was just passing, and thought I would look you up, that's all."

He tried to speak in a calm, matter-of-course tone; but if Barradale had been as observant as he usually was, he would have noticed that the man was suffering terribly from suppressed hilarity. Barradale, however, had not been called Scissors for thirty years, and the once-familiar nickname gave him such a shock that he noticed nothing with his bodily eye, though memory was busy in his brain, and, mentally, he saw old times again as plainly as if they had been yesterday.

"Why, you must be Paste," he almost gasped at last. He half rose from his chair, and was about, on the impulse of the moment, to welcome his visitor effusively, but when a man is in the swim, and is also such a comparatively feeble fish that he has to weigh carefully every word, and look, and action in order to keep his place, impulses should not be lightly yielded to, so he sat down again.

"Yes," said the other, "I'm Paste; good old stick-fast." He stopped, apparently expecting something that did not come.

"Ah!" said Barradale, resuming his usual languid manner. "The memory of those old days is very dim to me. We were young and foolish then. A nickname is apt to stick to one rather inconveniently, don't you think? Let me see; your real

name was Higgs, wasn't it? Mine is Barradale Smith. And what are you doing now, Mr.—er—Higgs? Not at the old place, surely?"

"Yes," replied the somewhat crest-fallen Mr. Higgs, "I'm there still, rubbing along in the old way. But you hadn't tacked on the Barradale in those days, and I had hard work to find you. Went about asking if any one knew where J. B. Smith, the 'Sun' Parliamentary reporter, hung out. At last I tumbled up against a friend of yours, and found you'd left the 'Sun' and the gallery too."

"Yes," drawled Barradale, smiling wearily as he wondered what was fame, and wished Mr. Higgs had been asking still. "I have left the 'Sun' a long way behind in the vale of years, and the gallery looms dimly at the vanishing point of my mental perspective, but I was christened Barradale, Mr. Higgs. I do remember that."

Mr. Higgs eyed Barradale curiously. Perhaps he thought there was something strange about a memory which could go so far back, and skip so much intermediate space.

"It's a pity you've forgotten the old 'Plympton Standard' days," he said drily. "We had some rare fun in the office now and again."

"Did we?" asked Barradale, sighing as if his weariness was almost unbearable. "I imagined that we slept most of the time, but then sleep was always considered the supremest bliss in Plympton, wasn't it? But may I ask why you have come to town, Mr. Higgs, and whether you have any special reason for honouring me with this call?"

"Well," replied Higgs, his shrewd eyes gleaming with the last sparks of expiring hope, or perhaps with the first of kindling anger, "I haven't had a real holiday for twenty years, and I thought I'd like to take a look round. Thought, too, you might find time to show me the lions and have a flare-up in our old pay-day spree style; but perhaps you're too busy."

If Mr. Higgs, who had climbed to that fourth floor—he had never noticed the lift—full of pleasant anticipations, thought that by reminding the friend of his youth of a pay-day spree he could thaw his icy reserve, he was doomed to disappointment.

"Unfortunately, yes," said Barradale, with difficulty suppressing all outward signs of an inward shudder at the idea of being seen with Mr. Higgs—on a pay-day

spree, too—at theatre or restaurant. "I am indeed very busy. What is more, Mr. Higgs, I am married."

"Yes, so your friend said," replied Higgs, curiosity and interest veiling for a time the light of anger in his eyes. "To Lesbia Lanthony, too. I should like to have seen her."

How Higgs, who was ignorant enough not to know that Jim Smith, of the "Sun," had developed into Barradale Smith of literature generally, came to be so glibly familiar with Mrs. Smith's pen-name was a mystery. Barradale's vanity was touched, and, at the risk of encouraging his visitor to prolong his stay, he endeavoured to solve that mystery.

"Yes," he said. "My wife will be sorry she has missed you; she is—er—out at present. You have heard of her, then?"

"Rather!" replied Mr. Higgs, with mortifying promptness and enthusiasm. "She's read as much as anybody down our way, is Lesbia. Strong domestic interest, yet nothing to make mothers uneasy. Abductions, but girls always rescued before scandal can get a word in edgeways. Kisses warm, but always scorch the right man; orange-blossoms and live happy ever after. You know."

Barradale did know, and had often urged his wife to try something less conventional. He sighed deeply, and wondered in how many years after his death the masses would acquire a truly cultivated taste.

"Of course," Higgs went on, "I had heard of you, too, but I didn't know you were you. You've changed your style since the Plympton days, and the Barradale led me wrong. You'll excuse me saying so, but you're too—too findy-sickle, don't they call it?—to really catch hold of readers. Readers, you see, are mostly young and hopeful—down our way, of course, I mean."

This was unbearable. Was he, Barradale Smith, to sit there and hear his inimitable style criticised by an ignorant clown, because in his rash youth he had been fool enough to associate with a dirty compositor? The man actually talked, too, as if he had some right to express an opinion. He might have been a publisher depreciating, in a business-like way, the value of that which he was about to buy, instead of being—what?—no doubt, a dirty compositor still.

How glad he was that he had not yielded to that momentary impulse! Had

he done so he could just imagine Higgs back at Plympton telling everybody to be sure and look up Smith when they went to town — Plymptonians usually came to town in batches, by excursion for seven, ten, or fourteen days—and Smith would see them through.

"Of course," he said coldly, but civilly — his struggles in the swim had at least taught him to keep his rage from boiling over — "I quite understand. But, really, Mr. Higgs, I am afraid you must excuse me. Work, you know, waits for no man, and I dare say you want to be off to the theatre or somewhere; best to be at the pit-door in good time. Stop one moment, though; I dare say I can help you a bit there. Where are you thinking of going to-night?"

"The Irreproachable," said Higgs. He, too, was full of rage, but, as he afterwards told a friend in Plympton, he wanted to see how far the cold-blooded beggar would go.

"Ah, yes!" ran on Barradale complacently. "A very good place too."

As he spoke he scribbled on the back of a visiting card :

"DEAR VINCENT,—Please find bearer a place in your upper circle, and oblige.—Yours,
BARRADALE SMITH."

"There," he continued, holding out the card between his finger and thumb, "hand that in at the box-office and it will be all right. So glad to have seen you. Good afternoon. Nothing more I can do for you, is there?"

Mr. Higgs had, unasked, taken a seat early in the interview. He rose, and planted his feet firmly on the carpet as one who meant to have his say before he moved.

"Yes, there is," he said, "you namby-pamby, white-livered writer of rubbish. You—you can give me that sovereign I lent you to pay your fare to London with, nearly thirty years ago, and you can keep your card for some one that won't be ashamed of the company of the name that's on it," and he flicked it contemptuously out of its owner's fingers.

To do Barradale justice he had forgotten all about that sovereign, which was only the last of a series of loans. The friends had shared and shared alike in what they called "spending brass," but, as the wages of the young compositor had been greater than the salary of the young

reporter, Higgs had had more brass to share. It was like him, of course, to remember such a trifle so long, but the mention of it at least gave Barradale a good excuse for taking a still loftier tone.

"There," he said, producing the required coin. "There you are, my good man, and now you have been paid, go; my time is valuable."

Higgs went without a word, and Barradale, giving a sigh of relief, sat for a few moments lost in thought. They had, he supposed, been rather intimate in the old days, and Higgs had done him many a good turn — yes, he admitted that — but then times change, and men with them. He had come to London and was a captain in the forefront of the literary battle; Higgs had stayed in Plympton and was still a camp-follower. Perhaps he had been rather too cool to him, and now that the man was gone he half regretted it — would have wholly regretted it but for the thought of those other Plymptonians, whom a cordial reception of Higgs might have brought in his wake.

"It would have been like relieving a tramp," he said to himself. "The poor beggar was perhaps hungry for sympathy, auld lang syne and all that sort of thing, but if he had got it he would have chalked the doorpost to a certainty. No, no; you were quite right, Barradale, my boy. It would never have done."

Then with another sigh he took up the note, which in the excitement of the interview he had neglected, opened it, read it, and rushed out of the room after Higgs.

"Mary! Mary!" he cried. "Has that gentleman gone?"

"Do you mean the man, sir?" asked Mary. "Yes, sir; he went down by the stairs swearing something awful."

"Run after him as quickly as you can, girl, and bring him back," gasped Barradale.

Mary went down by the lift and presently returned — alone.

"He's gone, sir," she said. "Clean gone. The porter said he tipped him a sovereign and told him to credit it to the humbug upstairs — meaning you, sir, I'm afraid — got into a hansom and told the man to drive to blazes. Is the poor gentleman out of his mind, sir?"

Mary was engaged to that porter, and, when she heard the episode of the sovereign, her sympathies went over to the visitor.

Barradale muttered something unintelli-

gible, returned to his study, and called angrily for his wife.

"What is the matter, James?" she asked placidly. "I wish you would try not to interrupt me before my time is up."

"Read that," he said, giving her the note, which ran thus :

"DEAR BARRADALE (alias Scissors)—I have caught the goose that lays the golden eggs and salted his tail with salt of savour strong enough to make a dead horse gallop. Which his mellifluous name is Higgs, and he claims to be an old pal of yours; also he admires your wife—that is her works—immensely.

"He is printer and proprietor of the 'Plympton Standard,' and half-a-dozen affiliated papers; president of the Great Northern Syndicate, and I don't know what all. Likes your idea, and is game to find any reasonable quantity of oil to make the 'wheels go round,' all because he says that when you were on the 'Standard' you had more brains than all the rest of the staff put together. Oh, what a staff it must have been, eh, dear boy? He says, also, that you have got into a bad style—seems to be a judge of what suits the B.P.—but that you can drop it if you like. Can you? The Higgs is romantic, and insists on paying you a surprise visit. He is a bit of a rough 'un, but full of enthusiasm. I send you these few lines to warn you against damping it.—Yours,

"T. ANSTRUTHER COATES."

"Oh, I am so glad, Jim," said his wife; Barradale could not induce her to drop the name under which he had wooed and won her long before he became notable. "There must be money in your idea, after all, if Mr. Higgs is going to take it up. They say he has no culture whatever, but is a first-rate judge of what will pay. As president of the syndicate he has sometimes written to me under my pen-name. I believe he thought I was a young girl. What an odd thing he should be an old friend of yours! You never told me. I wonder how long he will be? I must go and make myself presentable."

"You needn't trouble," said Barradale sardonically. "He's been. I hadn't read the note, and I quenched him. He

mentioned you, and your confounded sentimental stories too, and I thought it was like his infernal impudence. Why will you not take advice and let yourself be seen? If you had been in here I shouldn't have made such an ass of myself. Of course, when he asked for you I said you were out. How was I to know that such a lout was a purveyor of the stuff other louts imagine to be literature?"

Then he cursed, first his fate in general, and then his friend Mr. Coates in particular for spinning his note out to such a length with foolery when, if he had cut it short, it might have been delivered before Higgs arrived. Then he collapsed into the silence of despair as he suddenly realised the probable result of the meeting between Higgs and Coates.

Coates wrote paragraphs—nasty little personal paragraphs—about notable men, and liked much to get hold of amusing anecdotes of their early days. Hitherto he had spared his friend Barradale, partly because he knew nothing of his early days, and partly because they usually rowed in the same boat; but now, if this new scheme collapsed, they might be in separate interests, and the first line of Coates's note proved that his ignorance had been enlightened, to what extent Barradale dare not guess.

Whether these fears are groundless, time alone can show—Coates has an ugly habit of keeping back anything telling until his victim has done something more than usually remarkable, and Barradale has done nothing remarkable lately—but they are still so acute that, whether Mr. Higgs wants revenge or not, he has it.

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MISS KETURAH.

BY MARY ANGELA DICKENS.

CHAPTER I.

It was about eight o'clock on a cold, wet evening in January. There was nothing in the least unusual about the appearance of the streets of London on this particular evening, but to the occupant of a certain four-wheel cab which was jolting slowly westward they evidently presented an aspect of turbulence and danger that was little short of terrific. She was a little old lady, and she sat motionless on the extreme edge of the seat, clinging with one hand to a little old-fashioned reticule, and with the other to a bird-cage, gazing out of the window with her blue eyes round with alarm, and now and again ejaculating under her breath: "Oh, dear me! Oh, dear me!" She was driven right across London; at Piccadilly Circus she gave herself up for lost and shut her eyes tightly, still sitting bolt upright and clinging to her reticule and her bird-cage, unable to articulate the "Oh, dear me!" which formed itself upon her lips; and, finally, in a smart street in Kensington the cab came to a standstill.

A little gasp came from the little old lady as the cab stopped. But it was not a gasp of relief.

"Oh, dear me!" she murmured under her breath. "Oh, dear me!" And there was something piteous about the little whisper which nobody heard. Then it seemed to occur to her that it behoved her to get out; she did so accordingly in

considerable agitation and with some difficulty—the latter mainly occasioned by her unwillingness to trust to the cabman the contents of either hand—and stood upon the doorstep, her eyes fixed upon the door, her face working nervously. The door was opened almost immediately.

"Oh, dear me!" gasped the old lady. "I—hope it's the right house. I—I—am Miss Keturah Brown. Mrs. Forsyth? Oh!"

Behind the parlour-maid, who had opened the door, another woman had appeared, an elderly woman, also a servant evidently, but without cap or apron.

"Quite right, ma'am," she said quickly and reassuringly. "Will you please to walk in." She made an attempt as she spoke to relieve the old lady of the bird-cage, but Miss Keturah Brown clung to her burden evidently in all unconsciousness.

"Oh, thank you," she said nervously. "Yes, thank you. There's—there's the luggage and the man! What should I—what is—would five shillings—?"

"If you will walk in, ma'am," said the elderly servant, "Jane will settle with the man. You must be tired and cold, I am sure!"

She moved as she spoke, and the old lady, as though too much agitated and alarmed for resistance, followed her down the bright, luxurious hall until they came to an open door which led into a dining-room, small but perfectly appointed. There was a brilliant fire burning, and the table was daintily laid for one person.

"Oh, dear me!" faltered the old lady as she glanced timidly about her.

As she stood there in the soft light of the shaded lamp, in the midst of such luxuriously modern appointments, it was not surprising that Miss Keturah Brown was regarded by the woman who had followed her with eyes of respectfully concealed amazement. She was a very little, thin, old lady, and the black skirt which she wore was full all round, clearing the ground at the back as at the front. It was surmounted by a black cloth jacket, innocent of shape, over which again she wore a small Shetland shawl neatly folded to a cross-over. Her bonnet was of a large "coal-scuttle" shape, scantily adorned with a black ribbon, and amply provided at the back with curtain and in front with bonnet-cap. Her little trembling hands were concealed in black silk gloves several sizes too large for her.

"My mistress wished me to say, ma'am, how sorry she was that she could not receive you herself. Dinner will be ready for you directly, and I am to do everything in my power to make you comfortable!"

The alarmed blue eyes had desisted in their instinctive movement round the room as the woman spoke, and they glanced as if involuntarily from the speaker to the dinner-table.

"I—it is most—I am—greatly obliged!" said the little old lady hurriedly. "It is truly kind. But—dinner?"

The accent with which the faltering voice enunciated the last word clearly proclaimed a first introduction to the ceremony of late dinner, and the ghost of a smile touched the woman's face.

"Mrs. Forsyth thought that you would be hungry after travelling all day," she said discreetly.

"Mrs. Forsyth is—did I understand you to say that Mrs. Forsyth was—out?" hesitated the old lady apprehensively.

"She is at the theatre," answered the woman, with a glance of surprise.

The faintest shade of pink, the difficult wintry flush of age, stole into the old lady's cheeks. "Oh, dear me!" she murmured. "Yes, to be sure. Oh, dear me!"

"You would like to come to your room at once, ma'am?" said the woman. "You must feel very tired coming such a long way!"

But the woman, as she led the way upstairs, had no idea what was indeed the distance which the little old lady had traversed that day. In the past twelve

hours Miss Keturah Brown had journeyed, figuratively speaking, from one world to another.

All the years of Miss Keturah Brown's life had been lived in a remote little country town, where the narrow staidness of the most rigid Calvinism had dominated the very atmosphere. One by one all the members of her family had laid down their quiet, precise lives, and passed away into the quiet, precise church-yard, until Miss Keturah and one brother alone were left. A year before the wet January night that brought the little old lady to London this brother also had died; and before Miss Keturah had fairly settled down to her lonely life, another "dispensation," as she herself expressed it, fell upon her. She lost all her little property, and found herself practically penniless. It was at this juncture that she received a letter, signed "Diana Forsyth," in which the writer, after proving a distant relationship between herself and her correspondent through a certain renegade offshoot of the Brown family, who had gone to London and devoted himself to art, proceeded to offer the forlorn old lady a home. "I am a widow," the letter said, "and it seems a pity we shouldn't keep each other company, doesn't it?" Mrs. Forsyth lived in London, and was vaguely understood to be "worldly." But there was worse even than this: Mrs. Forsyth was an actress. Exactly what the term conveyed to Miss Keturah Brown and her friends it would be difficult to define; the conception it involved was as vague as it was horrifying. But the little old lady's first impulse was one of dismayed refusal. Finally, however, on discovering a subscription on foot among her grim old friends—none of whom had any money to spare—to save her from the only other alternative which presented itself, the workhouse, she made up her mind that it was her duty to accept Mrs. Forsyth's offer.

Two hours after her agitated arrival in Mrs. Forsyth's house, the old lady, considerably refreshed physically by the dainty little meal which had filled her soul with perturbation, was sitting alone in the drawing-room. It was a charming room, a little eccentric in its picturesque arrangement; such a room, in short, as Miss Keturah Brown had never seen; and she surveyed it now and again with much nervous foreboding in her eyes. She had removed all traces of her journey with scrupulous neatness. The short full skirt she wore now

was of worn black silk, as was the singular little jacket-like bodice. A little white shawl, fine as a cobweb, draped her shoulders, and she wore a white cap, not unlike a muslin nightcap. This was tied under her chin with narrow white ribbon, and from it there floated down on either side of her face lace streamers. Her face, now that rest and quiet had removed its excessive agitation, was singularly unwrinkled, withered though it was, and smooth bands of soft grey hair appeared beneath her cap border. Her little old hands, adorned with several mourning rings, held a grim-looking volume of sermons. She had emerged from her bedroom clasping this volume in her hand as though it presented itself as some sort of barrier between herself and the unknown by which she was surrounded. By-and-by, however, the book slipped into her lap, and her head, which had been nodding for some time, fell gently back against her chair. The suggestion offered by the elderly maid that she would not of course wait for Mrs. Forsyth's return had been scouted by her with gentle dignity. As she herself would have expressed it, she knew what was becoming under the circumstances, and nothing would have induced her to retire for the night until she had made her acknowledgements to her unknown hostess. But she was very tired, nevertheless, and having once succumbed to her drowsiness, she slept soundly. She did not hear the front door open with a latch-key at last, nor did she hear the sound of footsteps; she did not hear the drawing-room door open, or a man's voice say "By Jove!"

He was a tall, fair man in evening dress; he had come into the room with two ladies, and as the trio paused, another step came quickly up the stairs and a third woman appeared—a woman who looked little more than a girl, with bright auburn hair and laughing grey eyes. She, too, stopped short as she saw Miss Keturah.

"Oh, what a dear little old lady!" she exclaimed. Then, with a half-laughing softness on her mobile face, she advanced into the room and Miss Keturah woke.

She must have been dazed with sleep still, however, for instead of rising in prim trepidation to receive her hostess, as she would certainly have done had she been herself, she simply sat up and stretched out both her hands towards Mrs. Forsyth.

"Oh, you pretty creature!" she said.

CHAPTER II.

"BUT your baptismal name—I am truly sorry, my dear, to have to say it—your baptismal name has such a sadly unchristian sound!"

"Call me Di, then, my quaint Keturah! You can consider it the short for Dinah—and Dinah is Scriptural, isn't it?"

The words were uttered with a singularly sweet and delighted laugh, which robbed even the address of any shade of offence, and made it simply charming.

A fortnight had passed since Miss Keturah's arrival in London. The scene was the sunny little room assigned to her for a sitting-room. It was furnished with the quaint old furniture which had belonged to Miss Keturah's parents, and there was a certain bare and severe neatness about it which is peculiarly characteristic of the type of character to which Miss Keturah's family had belonged. Every inanimate object in the room was in perfect harmony with Miss Keturah's little old-world figure as she sat in her arm-chair by the fire. And the only other occupant of the room gave the finishing touch to the picture by adding to it the daring charm of contrast.

Mrs. Forsyth was standing by the fireplace leaning one arm on the mantelpiece, and looking down into Miss Keturah's face with eyes of infinite entertainment and delight. She was dressed in some kind of fresh delicate morning-gown of pale green, and her changing, bewildering beauty was modern in every line; modern, not in any sense of conventionality, but as being instinct with the spirit of the day. "Conventional," indeed, was just the word of all others which it was impossible to think of in connection with Diana Forsyth. She had been erratic, wilful, and enchanting from her childhood. The renegade Brown had been well treated by the art he had chosen to serve. He had been a successful painter, and his only child, motherless from her birth, had never known an ungratified wish. She had married at eighteen—for a freak, her father declared—a man much her senior. Her husband had left her a widow only a year after their marriage, and the death of her father a little later left her alone in the world. She travelled for two years, and then electrified her friends, first by announcing her intention of going on the stage, and then by developing genius in her suddenly adopted profession.

Miss Keturah looked up into her face for a moment with eyes in which bewilderment and fascination were blended with a haunting consciousness of the terrible "worldliness" of the woman before her.

"Di!" she murmured faintly. "Oh, dear me! I don't think—Di is so—so—"

"Well, it mustn't be Mrs. Forsyth!" said the owner of the unchristian name, with pretty imperiousness. "And Cousin Forsyth is quite paralysing to think of."

She let herself sink into the stiff old arm-chair which faced Miss Keturah, on the other side of the fire, clasping her hands behind her head as she fixed her eyes again on the little old lady.

"Where did you get your own delicious name?" she demanded.

The amusement in her eyes was so tender as to make her vaguely bewitching to Miss Keturah, and it was quite an effort to the latter to remember how reprehensible was the ignorance of Scripture displayed in the question.

"My love, you are forgetting," she said, with a little assumption of severity, before which the beautiful lips of Diana trembled slightly with laughter; "we read of Keturah in the Book of Genesis. One of the—the—wives of the patriarch Abraham was so called!"

Miss Keturah paused a moment; her eyes were resting on the lovely womanly figure opposite her, and apparently the sight touched a faint chord in her being overlaid even in her youth by the atmosphere in which she had lived. Almost as though involuntarily, and with a touch of consciousness which was almost pathetic in the innocent retrospect which it implied, she added :

"I remember once, when I was a young girl, overhearing inadvertently a remark of my dear father's, to the effect that he regretted that he had not called me Kerenhappuch."

"Kerenhappuch!" ejaculated Diana under her breath. Then to her quick sympathy there recurred a vague remembrance of some words she had heard—when or where she could hardly have said; those words by which the memory of the daughters of Job is handed down the ages invested with a shadowy fascination against which time is powerless. Her laughing lips softened as her grey eyes rested on the withered face, which in its age bore a mute witness to the girlish beauty which had faded untouched

by the deepest joys as by the deepest sorrows of life.

"In all the world were none so fair!" Diana quoted, incorrectly but very softly.

As though the words brought her back to herself with a shock, the old lady started violently and a faint flush stole into her cheeks.

"My dear!" she said, with fluttered remonstrance. "My dear! We don't—it is not seemly, I think—I have never considered such matters! Pray do not!"

Diana laughed, and a mischievous spirit seemed to come upon her. Shifting her position slightly, she began to shower questions upon Miss Keturah. Disconnected, erratic questions they were, about the life which the old lady had left behind her, and every now and then her low musical laugh would break out with a bewitching word which made it almost a caress. At last she rose, reluctantly enough.

"I must go," she exclaimed. "But you must see the world, my quaint Keturah! My heart is set on showing you the world. Come for a drive with me, now, this moment."

But Miss Keturah excused herself with some agitation.

"My dear, I feel it sadly ungrateful to say no to you in any matter, your kindness is so very great." Here Diana interposed with a warning shake of the head and of a slender threatening finger. "Yes, my love, you really must let me say so. But as to seeing the world, I really don't think—and I regret to say that as yet I have really sent no detailed communication to my friends. They will consider me sadly neglectful. And I propose to devote this morning to the accomplishment of that duty."

But, left to herself, Miss Keturah seemed to find the aforesaid duty a very heavy task. She made her precise little arrangements, took out a half-filled sheet of letter-paper, and took up her pen; and then she paused. She had already spent more than one unsatisfactory half-hour before that half-finished letter.

As a matter of fact, she had reached that point in her correspondence when some detailed description would be expected from her of the worldly woman who was alluded to among the grim, staid old friends from whom she had parted as her "connexion." And this description Miss Keturah found herself

absolutely incapable of composing. No phrases would occur to her with reference to her reprehensible "connexion" but such as were absolutely shocking to her in their tolerance for worldliness and affection for the worldly-minded—as represented by Diana. She was conscious of a desire—which amazed as much as it dismayed her—to palliate all the points of conduct which stamped Mrs. Forsyth as "a lost sheep," and dwelt exclusively upon her charms. "Such a sweet creature!" she murmured vaguely to herself, as she gazed helplessly at her paper. "Oh, dear me, such a sweet, kind creature!" But she was also keenly alive to the horror with which such a communication would be received by the worthy lady to whom it was addressed.

Finally, Miss Keturah decided that it was the part of a Christian woman to suspend judgement as long as might be. She disposed of the difficult question in a sentence in which she stated her intention of "extending her observation before committing to paper sentiments which might be considered premature," and finished her letter in triumph.

Miss Keturah "extended her observation" at her leisure as the days rolled into weeks, but sentiments which could be transmitted to her friends showed no signs of evolving themselves. The "unholy love" for Diana with which that lost sheep taxed her on one occasion, with a laugh of infinite enjoyment, developed day by day. Diana never attempted to conceal her knowledge of the struggle which it created in the little old lady; on the contrary, she appeared to take a mischievous pleasure in complicating it; exhibiting herself in her most wayward, capricious, and "worldly" moods, and then sweeping away Miss Keturah's horrified protests with irresistible fascination.

Miss Keturah, though she protested conscientiously, and was "painfully shocked," as she expressed it, again and again, was perfectly powerless to restrain her unruly affection.

Her tender interest in "my dear Diana," as she took to calling Mrs. Forsyth with much timid hesitation, developed in the little old lady perceptions which she had never exercised before; and a short time only had elapsed before that interest was extended to one of Diana's most frequent visitors. This was the man who had opened the drawing-room door on the night of Miss Keturah's arrival, a certain Mr. Marcus Ireland. There was that

about Mr. Marcus Ireland which induced in Miss Keturah during the earlier stages of their somewhat perfunctory intercourse a timid awe. "So—so—polished," she said to Diana. "S, exceedingly talented! My love, his conversation makes me feel a little giddy, do you know!" But this sensation in Miss Keturah was certainly produced by no flow of conversation on Mr. Ireland's part. His talents were evinced rather in the man's personality, in his indolent acceptance of the prominence unconsciously and instinctively assigned to him wherever and whenever he appeared than in any personal activity. Scarcely a day passed, as it seemed to Miss Keturah, on which he did not visit Diana. When she had other visitors he would make himself lazily agreeable to them; when he found Miss Keturah and Diana alone together he rarely talked at all, leaving the conversation to Diana, who seemed always unusually gay and fanciful on these occasions.

"You have never congratulated me on being no longer alone," she said to him with a laugh, as he rose to take leave on one of these occasions. She had drawn Miss Keturah's hand through her arm as she spoke, and she was looking into his impassive face with a laugh in her eyes.

Marcus Ireland looked at her for a moment in silence.

"Have I not, really?" he said. "Ah! allow me to take this opportunity!"

His voice was dry; "peculiar," Miss Keturah said to herself.

It was shortly after this that Miss Keturah matured the great discovery that there could be no manner of doubt but that Mr. Marcus Ireland was "greatly attached" to Diana; and it was with an exceeding flutter of delighted excitement that she accepted the further conviction that "dear Diana's heart was not untouched" by Mr. Marcus Ireland. Romance and sentiment, frozen into numbness throughout her life, thawed into a fluttering warmth in the simple old maiden breast as she watched the "courtship." With tentative, trembling delicacy, she ventured to reveal to Diana what she described as her "perception of the state of affairs." Diana flushed crimson, and gazed at her for a moment with something strange in her grey eyes; then she laughed, musically but no less strangely; a mood more than usually fanciful seemed to take possession of her, and with soft words and little tender laughs, she proceeded to draw the

old lady out, wiling her on to clothe in her prim, formal little phrases the innocent romance of her heart.

But as the months ran on, and winter and spring gave place to summer, Miss Keturah began to be vaguely troubled. That Diana should be wayward and capricious with her lover seemed to her by no means strange. Coyness, indeed, in her eyes, was but seemly. But by degrees she began to think that coyness might be carried to an excessive extent. Into the "courtship" there crept something which she could not understand—an element of which she was vaguely conscious, but which lay beyond the sphere of her innocently sentimental perceptions. Of Mr. Ireland's "intentions," as it seemed to Miss Keturah, there could be no possible doubt, and yet the consummation of the affair lagged. Clearly, therefore, the fault must lie with Diana. Mrs. Forsyth grew fitful and nervous. If Mr. Ireland did not come—and now and then his absences sent a cold chill through Miss Keturah's heart—she was restless and depressed. When he did come she was feverishly unlike herself. And she turned abruptly from Miss Keturah's most delicate allusion to the subject.

The end of June came. The theatre—a word which Miss Keturah never heard even from her dear Diana without a shudder—was to close immediately; and still Mrs. Forsyth had made no plan for leaving town. It was nearly twelve o'clock one night, and Miss Keturah, who always "retired" at ten, was lying wakeful with anxiety. During the past day Diana's feverish restlessness had touched such a point as it had never reached before. In the midst of her light, flippant talk she had alluded carelessly to a fact which Miss Keturah then learnt for the first time; namely, that Mr. Marcus Ireland had accepted a diplomatic appointment, and would shortly leave England for Russia. Poor Miss Keturah was unspeakably perturbed at the news. Diana had given her no opportunity for commenting upon it, even if she had felt able to do so, and she was reviewing the position of affairs now in much distress of mind, the little old face bordered by nightcap frills looking particularly small and troubled, when a low knock came at her door. "Oh, dear me! Come in," she said. And then as the door opened and a slight white figure came softly into the dimly-lighted room, she said agitatedly: "Diana! My love, I trust there is nothing amiss?"

Mrs. Forsyth had come quickly up to the bedside and stood looking down at her. She was very pale, and the past few months had made her much thinner; there were heavy shadows round her eyes now, and in the eyes themselves there was a constant look, which Miss Keturah's old eyes could not see, of strain and suffering.

"Nothing, Miss Keturah!" she said. "I only came—I thought perhaps you might not be asleep, and I thought I should like to say good night to you. I shan't see you in the morning, you see!" Her voice was low and not quite like itself.

"Thank you, my love," returned Miss Keturah affectionately. "True; dear Mrs. Frampton will expect me by eleven o'clock."

Mrs. Frampton was a connexion of one of Miss Keturah's old friends, and a connexion, as Miss Keturah had regretfully felt, of whom any one might be proud. "Most godly people, my love," she had assured Diana on more than one occasion. It had been a matter for anxious remorse with her when she realised a growing disinclination for the society of Mrs. Frampton—who was indeed a matron of such stony and severe demeanour that her proud connexions were most like to rejoice in her at a distance—and her voice as she spoke was a ludicrous combination of reluctance and self-reproach.

But Diana did not seem to notice it. She stood quite still absently stroking one of the withered old hands which lay upon the counterpane, and after a moment's silence, during which Miss Keturah looked anxiously up into her pale face, the little old lady took a desperate resolution.

"Diana, my love," she said, in a somewhat quavering voice, "I cannot fail to see that you are not yourself."

The movement of Diana's fingers stopped suddenly, and then the auburn head dropped gently down on to the pillow beside Miss Keturah. But Mrs. Forsyth did not speak, and Miss Keturah went on bravely:

"My love, I would not for a moment intrude upon affairs of the heart which must ever be sacred, but I feel that a word may be helpful to you. Diana, love, pardon me if I am wrong in believing that you are not disinclined towards Mr. Marcus Ireland?"

There was no answer, only the hand in which Miss Keturah's still rested closed suddenly and involuntarily.

"Then, my dear Diana, I feel that you

should bring yourself to confess your attachment. The time has come, my love, when it is hardly fair to your suitor to allow a very natural and admirable delicacy to hold you longer from that confession!"

There was a long silence. Diana softly lifted Miss Keturah's hand and put it to her lips. Then she sprang lightly to her feet and shook back her hair, her eyes shining rather wildly, her cheeks flushed. "Good night, my sweet Keturah," she said. "Good night, my sweet, quaint Keturah!" The next moment the door closed behind her. She had not kissed the little old lady.

There was no colour in her face when she reached her own room, and it was drawn and haggard. There was a letter clenched in her hand. "Yes or no," she said to herself. "Yes or no to-morrow! Why did I ever play with him? Oh, why, why?"

CHAPTER III.

IT was about five o'clock on the evening of the next day, and in her sitting-room stood Miss Keturah in her coal-scuttle bonnet and a black shawl of China crêpe. On the threshold was Diana's maid.

"My mistress told me you would not be in until eight o'clock, ma'am," she said, "or I would have had some tea ready. I will fetch you a cup directly."

But Miss Keturah refused tea with tremulous haste. She had not expected to return so soon, she said, but—here she faltered, and recovered herself with a quavering dignity—circumstances had arisen! The little old lady was flushed and trembling. She paused a moment and then said :

"If your mistress is within doors, Mrs. Mason, I shall be greatly obliged if you will give her my fond love and say that I should be glad to speak to her."

Nearly a quarter of an hour went by. Miss Keturah had retired to her bedroom, and returned to her sitting-room in her cap and the little white shawl, without which she was never seen, still trembling exceedingly, when the door opened suddenly and Diana came in. Her face was very white and set, but over its rigid lines there played a light of wild excitement, which sparkled and shone in her grey eyes and seemed to battle with a strange, far-away look of tense, reckless anticipation.

"What is it, my quaint Keturah?" she

said lightly. "What have the godly been doing to you that you reappear so early?"

Miss Keturah had risen on Diana's appearance, and had taken two little uncertain steps towards her.

"My love!" she began, and the quivering of her voice was pitiful to hear, "my love, I—I—have been exceedingly distressed."

In the curious excitement which seemed to possess her, Mrs. Forsyth apparently failed to appreciate the words, or the tone in which they were uttered. She laughed vaguely and gave a fanciful touch to the old lady's cap.

"What a pretty old lady you are, Keturah!" she said gaily, looking with strange, bright eyes into Miss Keturah's face. "What a pretty, innocent old lady!"

"My dear," said Miss Keturah, "if you will sit down for a few moments and listen to me, I am quite sure that you can reassure me on a point which has occasioned me great distress."

She seated herself, waiting while Diana threw herself into a chair with another light laugh; then she cleared her throat.

"I will not," she began, "pause to explain the details of the conversation between myself and the lady I have visited to-day—I regret that I can no longer refer to her as my friend. I will say at once, my love, that I need no words from you to convince me that the statement which she made so positively, and insisted upon with—with such unchristian feeling, is wholly false." Miss Keturah paused; she had spoken with growing agitation, and she was incapable for the moment of controlling her voice. Over the graceful, careless figure opposite her a stillness had fallen, and in the pause Diana rose suddenly and stood leaning against the window, looking out. Miss Keturah was too much occupied with her own emotion to protest against the movement, and she continued tremulously: "My love, you will believe me, I am sure, when I say that I only allude to the scandalous report which I am about to mention, because I am given to understand that it is currently believed among those who know you only in that public capacity which I can never sufficiently deplore for you."

Diana's forehead was pressed against the window-pane now, and the hand which held the curtain was tightly clenched. But she did not speak.

"My dear," faltered Miss Keturah, "I

have heard it asserted to-day that Mr. Marcus Ireland is a married man!"

There was a dead silence. Diana never moved. Miss Keturah sat braced for the outbreak of passionate indignation which she vaguely expected, her face uplifted and working nervously. Still, Diana did not move, and gradually the withered old face began to alter. There stole over it a look of bewilderment, of incredulity, of reluctant, horror-struck questioning.

"Diana!" murmured Miss Keturah faintly. "Diana!"

Then Diana turned. Her eyes fell on the little old face, a picture of absolute, blank dismay, and the drawn lines of her face broke up suddenly in a burst of hysterical laughter. She fell on her knees, and buried her head in Miss Keturah's lap.

"Oh, Keturah!" she cried. "My quaint Keturah, did you never hear of such a thing before?"

There was no answer, and Diana, choking back her laughter, raised her head abruptly. Miss Keturah was lying back in her chair, white and shaking.

Over the recklessness of Diana's face there flashed a wholly indescribable expression, and she stretched out her hands impulsively.

"Ah!" she cried, "dear, don't! Don't! Is it so dreadful to you?" Her voice was low, and ringing with a love and pity which was penetrated with some poignant feeling less easily defined.

Miss Keturah's lips moved, but for a moment no words were audible. Then she said in a faint whisper:

"I am so shocked! So grievously shocked!"

There was no assumption about the words; no sitting in judgement, and no condemnation. Before the perfect simplicity of the innocent feeling to which they witnessed, Diana dropped her forehead once more upon the trembling hands she held. There was another pause, and then Diana lifted her head and rose.

"Prejudice, Keturah!" she said, with defiant lightness. "Arrant slavery to words and forms! Marcus Ireland is a married man. That is to say, he has a wife from whom he is separated. But except for the name of the thing, he is absolutely free!"

The physical effects of the shock were passing from Miss Keturah. Her lips were less ashen though she still trembled, and she drew herself up in her chair, as she said with gentle severity:

"My love, you are speaking at random! The marriage bond is sacred."

"Love is sacred!" cried Diana passionately, facing round as she stood by the window. "Love, and nothing else in the world!" She stopped herself abruptly, and laughed, a high-pitched, tuneless laugh. "Why, even you, my quaint Keturah," she said, "even you, brought up in a world in which sentiment and sin are synonymous, I suppose, have a soft corner in your dear old heart, in which you cherish your innocent little romanticisms! Don't be a slave, Keturah!"

"My dear," said Miss Keturah, "I do not think I follow you exactly, but I believe I understood you to refer to the sacred qualities of love." A faint flush touched Miss Keturah's cheek as she spoke the word softly and reverently, "It is this very sacredness, attached to it as I am convinced by divine ordinance, which makes it so incumbent upon us to preserve the treasure when it is committed to us in perfect spotlessness. An affection which is in itself sinful——"

Another reckless laugh broke from Diana.

"Sinful!" she cried lightly. "We don't talk about things being sinful nowadays, Keturah! It has gone out! Things are 'bad form' or 'bad taste,' that's all!"

Miss Keturah met her eyes with grave simplicity.

"I am well aware, my dear Diana," she said, "that forms of expression have undergone extensive alteration, but facts of right and wrong cannot change. My dear, I am sure that your own woman's instinct cannot be at fault in such a matter."

Diana stood motionless, gazing down with strange, fascinated eyes into the face uplifted to her, so dignified in the perfect innocence of its age. Then with a strangled gasp she lifted her clasped hands and pressed them tightly to her heart, turning away as she did so.

At that instant there came a knock at the door, and Diana started as though she had been shot. She turned sharply towards the door, with fixed, dilated eyes.

"Come in!" she said; and her voice was high-pitched and harsh.

The door opened and Diana's maid appeared.

"If you please, ma'am," she said, addressing Diana, "Mr. Ireland is in the drawing-room."

She waited a moment as though for a word from her mistress; then receiving none, withdrew, shutting the door after her. Diana stood motionless and rigid, staring straight before her.

"Diana, my love!" Moments had elapsed, and the words came from Miss Keturah, low and tremulous. As she heard them, Diana stretched out her hand, suddenly and without turning, and caught Miss Keturah's in a convulsive pressure.

"Miss Keturah!" she said. "Miss Keturah!" Her breath was coming in laboured gasps, and the two words rang like a cry for help.

But Miss Keturah's answer to that cry was all unconscious. The depths from which it came were utterly beyond her ken, and she only understood that "dear Diana was sadly distressed." She rose, trembling, but with a little flush of determination on her old face.

"My love," she said, "I feel that it is better for all concerned that you should not meet this unhappy gentleman again. I will go to him, Diana, and tell him that you are awake to the—the unsuitability of the intercourse you have hitherto permitted, and—with your leave, my love—I will request him to discontinue his visits for the short time he remains in England. My dear, believe me, this is a step you will never regret."

Diana, still with that clutch upon the hand she held, turned her head slowly and looked at Miss Keturah. There was an intensity in her eyes as of a woman at the very crisis of her life.

"Regret!" she said, "regret!" Her voice was low and shivering. Then she broke suddenly into a kind of hoarse cry. "You!" she cried. "You will go to him? Yes! Yes! You shall! Quick! Where is some writing-paper?"

She was seeking feverishly on the table, and finding what she wanted, she fell on her knees and scribbled a few lines in pencil. Then in the same desperate haste she folded the paper and held it out to Miss Keturah without rising.

"Take it!" she cried hoarsely. "Tell him it is my answer."

Bewildered and confused, clearly conscious of nothing but her conviction that what was unsuitable must cease, Miss Keturah took the note. She paused a moment at the drawing-room door; then she turned the handle and passed in, her quaint little figure very erect, her face a little flushed.

Mr. Marcus Ireland was standing at the farther end of the room, and as the door opened he turned quickly. Seeing Miss Keturah, however, he paused abruptly for an instant. Then he came forward with rather careless courtesy to meet her. His face was pale, and his cold blue eyes were preoccupied and hungry-looking.

"Good day!" he said nonchalantly. "Mrs. Forsyth is at home, isn't she?"

Miss Keturah had made him a stiff little curtsey, ignoring his offered hand, and she replied with prim formality:

"Mrs. Forsyth is at home. She has, however, asked me to represent her in the reception of your visit, and she has charged me with an explanation on her behalf."

Mr. Marcus Ireland stared down at the little old lady, who met his eyes with mild severity. Then he caught his moustache with savage impatience between his teeth.

"Perhaps you will be good enough to explain?" he said.

Miss Keturah drew herself up firmly.

"The duty that devolves upon me is a most painful one," she said. "I cannot attempt to conceal my sense of the reprehensibleness of the conduct which renders explanation necessary—conduct originating, I feel, as far as my dear Diana is concerned, in the thoughtlessness of youth."

She stopped, regarding him with an expression of stern disapproval which showed no disposition to extend a similar excuse to him; and into the face of the man there crept an ugly smile. He bowed ironically.

"I will not point out," continued Miss Keturah, "the exceeding impropriety of your constant visits to my dear young friend, you being, as I have only this day been given to understand, a married man; nor will I allude"—Miss Keturah's cheeks were burning painfully—"to the reports to which these visits give rise. I will merely say that Mrs. Forsyth has become fully alive to the—the unseemliness of the existing position of affairs, and that she begs that you will discontinue your visits for the short time during which, as I understand, you will remain in England."

She paused. She was facing him bravely, but her breath was short as she finished speaking. Marcus Ireland bowed again with mock deference.

"Miss Brown has discharged her mission to admiration!" he said. He was moving forward with insolent coolness to open the door for her, when Miss Keturah held out to him the note she carried.

"I am charged to give you this," she said. "Doubtless—"

But Marcus Ireland interrupted her. As his eyes fell upon the note his face changed suddenly into hard lines of intense expectancy. He took it quickly, tore it open, and as he read the lines Diana had written, his features were absolutely transformed by the convulsion of rage which passed across them. A fierce imprecation broke from him, and Miss Keturah uttered a little cry. Then he controlled himself into his usual cynical calm. He crushed the letter deliberately in his hand and turned to Miss Keturah.

"Pardon me in that I had underrated your talents, my dear madam!" he said. "You have—"

The sentence was never finished. The door opened and Diana appeared, white to the very lips, her great grey eyes burning and shining. She seemed to take in the position at a glance, and she went straight across the room to Miss Keturah, took one of the little old lady's hands in hers, and so turned and confronted Marcus Ireland.

"I have come," she said, "because I thought you ought to hear it from my own lips. My answer is, No, no, no!"

For an instant Marcus Ireland met her eyes in silence. Then as they still faced each other, his face now as white as hers, he said in a low, hoarse voice:

"Do you remember that I leave England to-morrow?"

"Yes," she said.

There was a pause. Except for the clasp in which Diana held Miss Keturah's hand, the man and the woman alike seemed absolutely oblivious of the little old lady's presence.

"Diana!" he said.

"No!"

"You will not come with me? This is—good-bye?"

"Good-bye!"

He waited a moment, still holding her eyes in his. Then he moved slowly towards the door, and with his hand on the lock turned and looked at her again. Diana never moved, only her hold on Miss Keturah tightened. Then the door closed behind him, they heard his footsteps die away down the stairs, and they heard the street-door shut behind him.

Diana turned with a low, wailing cry, and let her face fall on the little old lady's shoulder.

"Oh, Miss Keturah!" she cried, "I loved him! I loved him!"

But the tremulous old hand to which she clung had saved her. She had stood on the brink of a precipice, and it had held her back. Marcus Ireland had passed out of her life for ever.

BLACKMAIL.

BY FLORENCE TERRY.

Author of "Connie's Hero," "A Commonplace Romance," "A Daughter of the People," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A STRIP of red drugget across the pavement, an awning over it, and a man stationed at the edge of the footpath, signified to people passing through Portland Place that Lady Topham was giving a dance. A small but decidedly various crowd had gathered on either side of the red strip to criticise the smart folks as they walked from carriage to house, into which they passed to be swallowed up in a blaze of light. A workman, who had been silently contemplating the arrivals for some time, suddenly took hold of the bowl of his pipe and, removing it from his mouth, waved the stem in the direction of the doorway, through which some people were just passing.

"Them's the sort the country 'ud be a jolly sight better without: what do you think, matey?"

The man thus addressed turned his eyes in the direction of the speaker. He also had been watching the smart folk, but with a curious expression on his face for a man attracted by mere idle curiosity. His lips were firm and compressed, and there was a hard gleam in his eyes which betokened that his sensations were not altogether pleasurable. A rather wry smile distorted his mouth for an instant before he answered.

"I think so, too," he said, then added, "at present."

The other looked somewhat doubtful as to what this addendum might mean.

"I thought you was one of us when I saw the way you looked at the nobs. There was a sort of hamiable expression on yer face wich spoke volumes."

"Us—meaning?"

"Socialists, guv'nor; and 'at present' meaning?"

"I mean that we on the pavement are generally Socialists only until we get into the house."

The workman took this expounding of

his doctrine in good part, and grinned appreciatively.

"Dessay you're right," he said good-humouredly. "If we was togged up in a swaller-tail coat, with a big diamond stuck in the middle of a dicky, we should say as Socialism was all tommy-rot, too."

The other nodded, but did not reply, and his neighbour, striking a match on the leg of his trousers, relighted his pipe, which in the course of conversation had gone out. He smoked meditatively for a moment as if he were preparing a fresh remark on the same subject, when the arrival of another carriage claimed his attention.

This was a very perfectly appointed brougham, drawn by a pair of splendid dark bays, and was a turn-out which meant money, and plenty of it.

Immediately behind it was a smart private hansom, out of which sprang a good-looking young fellow, who hastened forward to join the party which was alighting from the brougham. They were an elderly but well-preserved man, a quiet-looking woman nearly his own age, and a young girl. As the last stood for a moment in the light of the lamp, a little buzz of admiration arose amongst the critics on the pavement. Not that she was so strictly beautiful, or that her features called for special remark. There was a general impression of soft, fair hair, and a clear, pale skin, gleaming white teeth, and laughing eyes, but the girl herself was the very incarnation of health and joy, of brilliant spirits, and a vigorous appreciation of all that goes to make life delightful, and a thing to be desired.

"D'y'e know who that is?" said the workman to the man by his side, as the party disappeared into the house. "D'y'e see that carriage and that rig-out? Paid for with other folks' money, guv'nor. That's Francis Ludlow, Esquire, gentleman at large, company promoter. Swindlers I call them sort."

"The girl's pretty, though," said another man.

"'Er frock's pretty. Fine feathers make fine birds," retorted a woman.

The workman laughed.

"They're all alike, ain't they, bless 'em," he said to his neighbour. "Can't abear to give no other woman credit for 'er looks."

"I suspect there is much the same nature under both silk and cotton," the young man said curtly, and turning away he strode into the darkness of the night.

His object was gained. It was not the first time by many that he had stood for an hour or more waiting just to catch a glimpse of Ida Ludlow, a momentary glimpse to appease the hunger of his soul—a pleasure which was always marred by the sight of her father. Swindler, the workman had called him, and who should know how true that was better than he?

That his own father had died of a broken heart, hiding his poverty and his suffering to the end with all the strength of a proud nature; that he himself was poor, friendless, and alone; he owed to Francis Ludlow. It is not an easy thing to hate a man with every fibre of one's being, to hunger and thirst for vengeance, to long to drag one's enemy in the dust, and at the same time to love his daughter with just as much strength and intensity. It means being a prey to conflicting passions which tear and rend their victim, swaying him now this way, now that. Andrew Jardine was a good hater, not in a mean small way which expends its force in petty spite and animosity, but in a large, whole-hearted fashion which smites and spares not when the opportunity comes.

But though his opportunity had come, yet he held his hand.

Nearly a year ago chance had thrown his enemy's daughter into his path. They had met at a country vicarage where Ida was visiting the Vicar's young wife. Andrew had been ill, and rest and change being imperative, he had betaken himself to a farmhouse near the village, there to recruit his strength. The Vicar was a friend of the Jardines, one of the few who remained faithful in the face of adversity; and during the month he mixed with the quiet, uneventful life of the little community, Andrew's opportunities for meeting Miss Ludlow were many. At first the mere mention of her name had made him inwardly recoil, but soon her absolute unconsciousness of wrong, her brightness, her vivid personality, worked their charm, and before he was aware of danger, Jardine found himself in bonds which he was powerless to break.

Even at that time he had been working slowly but surely to a certain end, and not long after his return to town the remaining evidence of Mr. Ludlow's secret rascality fell into his hands. Two months before he would have rejoiced at the power of causing the downfall of his enemy; now he held back, and asked himself what he should do.

Gradually there grew into his mind a purpose; instead of casting down the man he hated, he would use him as a stepping-stone to his own happiness. On the one hand lay revenge and outer darkness, on the other the possibility of light, and life, and love.

A few hours later Jardine and the man he hated were face to face. Of the two it was Jardine, however, who seemed ill at ease; for, in spite of justice being on his side, he did not like the task he had set before him. Mr. Ludlow had received him with bland courtesy and an impassive face. His visitor's name conveyed no warning to him. Andrew Jardine's father had been but one of the crowd of rash speculators on whom he had thriven, and it was impossible to remember them all.

At first, indeed, he had misunderstood Jardine altogether, and thought he was one of the numerous applicants for situations with large salaries and nothing to do, with which rich men are pestered. With this idea he had endeavoured to cut short his visitor's introductory speech, with the manifest desire of getting rid of him as speedily as possible.

"We are playing at cross purposes," Jardine said, hurried into declaring his object without circumlocution. "If you read these papers it will simplify matters, I think."

Mr. Ludlow waved them gently aside.

"I really have no time—" he began, when the other interrupted him.

"They relate to the affairs of the Dyke Mining Company."

For an infinitesimal portion of time Mr. Ludlow hesitated; but so slight was the pause that any one less watchful than Jardine would not have detected it at all.

"The Dyke Mining Company was wound up five years ago. It is of no further interest to any one," he answered quietly.

"Except to those who lost their money in it," said Jardine.

Mr. Ludlow shrugged his shoulders.

"I hope you were not one of those unfortunates," he said politely.

"No, I date my ruin further back, to the time of another hitherto undetected fraud."

As he spoke the eyes of the two men met, and for the first time Mr. Ludlow realised his danger.

The knowledge braced him and called all his faculties into play. Calmly he put out his hand for the papers which Jardine still held, and opening them, deliberately perused them from beginning to end.

"A very clear and concise account of an interesting piece of business, if there were only any truth in it," he remarked coolly, as he refolded the sheets.

"Mr. Ludlow, the time for that sort of denial is past. Of every accusation I have ample proof."

"Ah! Would it be indiscreet to enquire from what source you have gained this knowledge, and where your witnesses lie hidden?"

"It would be very indiscreet if I were to tell you," retorted Jardine, in a tone as dry as his own.

"I will not pretend to misunderstand you, though I still fail to grasp the motive for this visit. Chance has thrown in your way, or you have deliberately set to work to discover, certain facts which you imagine it is my interest to conceal. If you yourself believe that I planned the wholesale robbery of the Dyke Mine shareholders, and hold such irrefragable proofs of my dishonesty, why did you not apply for a warrant for my arrest, instead of seeking an interview with me?" As he spoke he laid his hand lightly but with contemptuous significance on a cheque-book which lay beside him. Jardine flushed hotly and for a moment looked dangerous, then calming himself with an effort he answered:

"You may put away your cheque-book, I have not come for money."

"Then, my dear sir, why have you spared me, and what have you come for?" said Mr. Ludlow, in the tone of one whose patience is exhausted.

"I have spared you for the sake of your daughter," Jardine said curtly.

For the first time a look of anger came into the older man's face.

"Leave my daughter out of the discussion," he said haughtily.

"Unfortunately I cannot. A year ago I made her acquaintance while staying at Bitton. I have never forgotten her, I never shall, and I come to you to-day as a suitor for your daughter's hand."

"I see; the child is to pay for the father's misdeeds, quite in the good old style," said Mr. Ludlow, with a slow, contemptuous smile. "Pardon me, Mr.—er—Jardine, if I give you a word of advice. You have mistaken your vocation. Turn your attention to melodrama and you may make a fortune, which I fear you never will as a journalist, which you tell me you are, or as an adept in the dangerous profession of blackmailing."

"It is you who are talking melodrama,

not I," said Jardine. "I simply ask permission to visit at your house, and make no secret of my motive for doing so. I demand a fair chance like any other man, with this addition, that you will use all legitimate means to further my wishes."

"You are an impudent scoundrel. Do you think I will permit my daughter to marry an unknown adventurer to save myself a few hours' annoyance?"

"Ten years' penal servitude," amended Jardine quietly. "But your objection is beside the mark, because I am not an unknown adventurer. A Jardine of Blankshire cannot be sneered at in point of birth, and I have a clean record, Mr. Ludlow. That I have no fortune, you should be the last man in the world to cavil at, as it was one of your schemes which ruined my father."

"Taking all you say for granted, I would not force my daughter's inclination in this matter even if I could—even if I could," he repeated with emphasis.

"I am not asking you to make the attempt, I am simply begging your consent to marry Miss Ludlow should I be fortunate enough to win her affections, and ask you to give me opportunities to try to gain them."

A heavy frown gathered on Mr. Ludlow's face. It was evident that the proposition was distinctly unpalatable. There was silence for a few moments, which Jardine, guessing that any pleading would weaken his own cause, did not attempt to break. A clock striking the hour startled Mr. Ludlow from his reverie.

"I can give you no longer now," he said hurriedly. "I am already late for an important appointment. At present, Mr. Jardine, you have merely made an accusation against me without producing a tittle of evidence which would have any weight in a law court. I absolutely deny the whole thing, and most men in my position would kick you out of that door. However, you are young and hot-headed, and I am willing to make some allowance for you in your peculiar circumstances. Therefore, if you like to dine with me to-night at eight o'clock, quite 'without prejudice,' mind, we can discuss the matter further."

CHAPTER II.

IT was summer time, and the soft evening breeze was touching everything lightly, lovingly, like cool finger-tips on a fevered brow. In a boat sat a man and a girl. He

had given up rowing, and they drifted with the current as the stream bore the boat gently along between wooded banks.

For a time neither of them spoke, so well satisfied did each seem with the mere presence of the other. The girl was idly watching the little ripples her fingers made in the water as she trailed her hand over the side of the boat, while he watched her face with his whole soul in his eyes.

"Of what are you thinking?" she asked at last, looking up and meeting his glance.

"Of the wonder of it all," he said, with lover-like vagueness. "A year ago I had no more chance of winning you than I had of winning a Royal Princess; to-day I know that you will belong to me for ever."

"Suppose—only suppose, mind—that I was fickle and changed my mind," she said.

"You are my fate, Ida; I must always love you, whatever happens."

"It has been fate all along," she said musingly. "Our meeting at the Bellamys', your getting to know father just when you did, just in the nick of time as it were."

"You mean Talbot," he said quickly. "I believe you had more than half a liking for that curled Assyrian bull."

"He is a good fellow," she said stoutly; "but never mind him. Even if I liked him once, I like you better now."

"Say love," he said, "love which will be with us always. Even when we are quite old, and are going down the hill hand in hand, you shall only see me as I am now, for I shall be your lover still."

Some months had passed since that evening when Jardine had made up his mind, and he had so far succeeded all along the line.

"Are you sure you love this man?" Mr. Ludlow had asked anxiously of his daughter.

"Quite sure, father dear. Are you not pleased? I thought you saw and approved."

"To tell the truth, Ida, I saw, but I thought that George Talbot was the favourite."

"You speak as if you were disappointed."

"No, no, dear. So that you are happy, that is all I care for."

Disappointed! He scarcely dared to tell himself how disappointed. Why had she not cared for Talbot instead?

But if he had thought the matter over he would have seen that on the principle that extremes meet, it was only natural that

Jardine should have an attraction for Ida. Ever since she could remember anything, she had been surrounded by the lilies and roses of life. Her mother had died when she was only ten years old, but her place had been well filled by a widowed sister of her father's. Mrs. Grace held but one theory as to the bringing up of children—to fill their youth with happiness, so that whatever the future might bring, they had a stock of sunshine to fall back upon. Accordingly Ida knew nothing of the stern realities of life, and Jardine was the first person she had met who disdained to keep up the pretty Society fiction that the world was a huge playground inhabited by people for whom it was always play-time.

In her little circle no one was particularly in earnest about any big thing, though they expended a vast amount of energy over trifles. The heads were mostly connected with the City in one way or another, and while they made the money their wives and sons and daughters spent it. So no doubt the fathers were serious enough, but then in social gatherings fathers don't count. Some of the sons dabbled a little with law-books and dinners as a preparation for the Bar, a few eyed the Army with a certain amount of favour, while fewer still coquetted with the Church, but they were all gay and debonair about it, just as were their sisters about their little pet crazes and foibles. But Jardine was different. Not that he was sulky or stupid, or disliked fun, but there was a breezy cynicism about him, a bluff Carlylesque contempt for cant and shams which prevented him from giving the Pas de Quatre and the Barn Dance the importance which those triumphs of terpsichorean art deserved, while even the very last new craze adopted by smart people merely moved him to a languid smile, not altogether devoid of contempt. For some time all went as smoothly as the hearts of lovers could desire.

Strangely enough the discordant note was struck by Jardine himself. As the time approached when they should discuss the date of their marriage, Jardine began to talk of himself and his prospects in a manner Ida could not understand. He took to sounding her, as it were, as to how large or rather how small an income would suffice to make her happy, with a complete ignoring of the fortune which Mr. Ludlow had always promised to settle upon her at her marriage with his consent. It was no use for her to playfully insist on

dangling this before his eyes, to say that in round figures it would rather more than double their income, because he simply waved it aside without vouchsafing any explanation whatever, and came doggedly back to his starting-point—would she be content to live with him on considerably less than five hundred a year?

"It is absurd wanting me to answer a question on a matter which will never arise," she said one day, irritated at last by his persistence.

Jardine got up and began to pace the room with long strides.

"Did it never strike you, Ida, that when a man in my position loves a girl in yours, he lays himself open to misconception and calumny?"

"I do not see how," said Ida, shaking her head obstinately.

Jardine smiled.

"I have no money except a moderate income which I earn from day to day, while you are the daughter of a rich man. The world will call me a fortune-hunter."

"If I were old and ugly it might, but—" an eloquent shrug finished the sentence.

"As it is you are too adorable for there to be any fear, you think," said Jardine, looking at her as if he thought so too in spite of his words.

"You earnest people who take everything with such alarming seriousness are very impracticable sometimes. Tell me, Andrew, what it is you really want."

"I want to know, dear, if you would be content to marry me as I am now, a hard-working journalist, with no recommendation except that I love you with all my soul; to come to me empty-handed; to trust all your future to me without a thought or regret for the luxury you leave behind."

"If it were necessary, yes; but it is not necessary, and even if I were willing, father would not hear of such a proceeding."

"But if he agreed to it?" Jardine asked quickly.

"He would not agree," said Ida coldly. "Neither he nor I are so much in love with unnecessary self-sacrifice as you appear to imagine. Were there occasion for it, no doubt I should bear my part; as it is, your suggestion is absurd."

Seeing that she was hurt, Jardine allowed the discussion to drop for the time. But the seed was sown. Ida could not forget Jardine's earnest per-

sistency, and the idea that sooner or later he would return to the subject made her uneasy, almost unwilling to be alone with him.

In turn he too began to feel hurt and angry, and made a resolution to speak directly to Mr. Ludlow on the subject which had raised such a barrier between himself and Ida. But here again he was baffled.

"I quite appreciate the subtly conveyed insult of your objection to accept, however indirectly, any of my money, Mr. Jardine, but you must settle it with Ida. She and Mrs. Grace have known for some years that I intended giving her ten thousand pounds as a marriage portion. You forced my consent, and I have no reason to withhold her dot, if she claims it. You can give her no reason for not taking it but an overstrained whim, which Ida is quite intelligent enough to see is not complimentary to me."

What he said was perfectly true. Jardine had forced his consent, and found too late that it carried with it a condition which was peculiarly obnoxious under the circumstances.

To Ida, much as she loved him, his objection appeared ridiculous, almost unworthy. It was as though, for the mere gratification of a piece of petty pride, he would selfishly deprive her of many things to which she had been accustomed all her life. On his part he could not quite put himself in Ida's place, and appraising things too much according to the value he would have put upon them, he judged her harshly.

At first Mrs. Grace, with perhaps more romance than common sense, had taken Jardine's side and urged Ida to give in to her lover's wish, but Mr. Ludlow, on becoming aware of this, had given her a strong hint to adopt the opposite view. This Mrs. Grace was too fond of Andrew to do, but Mr. Ludlow's hints were generally acted upon by his household, so that she deemed it best to follow his advice so far as to abstain from further argument, and to remain neutral. Thus Jardine lost a powerful ally.

Probably in time Ida would have submitted, for her love for Jardine was strong enough to carry her through any sacrifice, but with crafty cunning Mr. Ludlow set to work to widen the breach between them.

At the first sign of a disagreement he began to hope that a carefully planned

scheme of his might yet be carried through.

For a long time he had endeavoured to draw Mr. Talbot into his net, but when Ida's engagement was announced the young man had ceased to take any interest in Mr. Ludlow's companies and combinations. Mr. Ludlow was annoyed, but had submitted to his disappointment with a fairly good grace; lately, however, circumstances had arisen which made Mr. Talbot's co-operation of vital importance. Times were ticklish; the hitherto gullible public was growing wary and most reprehensibly cautious. Things which worked splendidly ten, nay, five years ago, would not now catch a child, and Mr. Ludlow found himself in the unenviable position of a man who has built a house on a rotten foundation. It was constantly requiring a prop here and a stay there, which if not placed at the right moment would result in the whole edifice toppling down and burying the owner beneath its ruins.

At present there was but one idea in his mind: Talbot must be secured, and if there was no other way, Ida must be sacrificed. Not that he used the word sacrifice even to himself, for after all Ida had certainly shown George Talbot great favour before Jardine had appeared on the scene, therefore she evidently liked him, and did she but know it, all her father's schemes were for her benefit.

With such sophistry did Mr. Ludlow deceive himself, till at last a plan began to take shape in his mind. At the cost of an unpleasant scene with his daughter, during which he would to a certain extent have to give himself away, he could snap the already enfeebled tie between Ida and Jardine. This once accomplished, he had no fear of being able to twist Talbot round his finger. With any one but Jardine, such a trick would have been too risky, but Mr. Ludlow had gauged his man, and knew that his love for Ida was too great to allow him to put his old threat into execution, while of the new treachery he would never have any suspicion.

Strangely enough, Jardine was blind to the possible end of the strained relations between himself and Ida. If the thought had entered his mind he would have rejected it with contempt.

"When two people really love each other nothing parts them," he would assert dogmatically; and nothing less than an incoherent, yet forcible, letter from Ida, in which she stated her conviction that they

were utterly unsuited to each other, and prayed to be released from her engagement, would have opened his eyes to the truth.

Startled and dismayed, he hastened to see her, only to hear from her lips the words she had already written to him.

"But I cannot understand it," he said, with anger and wounded pride struggling for mastery. "You loved me two weeks ago, to-day you say you love me no longer. Is it this wretched money that has come between us?"

"We look at things so differently," she said evasively; "and I am sure there can be no happiness where people are not agreed."

"Ida," he pleaded, "we agreed till just lately, surely you will not let such a trifle part us."

"Will you marry me with my fortune settled on myself?" she said quickly.

"I cannot consent to that," he answered, not noticing the manner in which she had worded her question. "But neither will I consent to leave you," he continued.

"You surely would not hold me to my word against my will," she said, with almost a frightened look in her eyes.

"Is it absolutely your will to be released?" he asked, with a coldness which belied the heat within.

"It is really my wish," she answered, with a little pleading movement of her hands.

"There is no need to look like that," he said sharply. "I will persuade no woman to marry me against her will. You toss aside my love and prefer your father's money. So be it. You will see me no more."

Seizing his hat, he hurried from the room, nearly knocking against Mrs. Grace, who was coming in. He never stopped or looked behind, so that he did not see Ida fall almost unconscious into her aunt's outstretched arms.

CHAPTER III.

IN after time Jardine could never recall those weeks without a shiver. He suffered as only a strong man can suffer—silently, and in secret. Like one who has had a limb amputated, he felt numbed and crushed with the bitter knowledge that henceforth he must go maimed.

Could he but have held Ida blameless, he would not have suffered quite so keenly; as it was, he had not only lost

the woman, but all that that woman had symbolised to him. He had placed her on a pedestal, and decking her with all the virtues and graces which a true-hearted man loves to believe belong to womanhood, he had adored her with all the strength of his young, unworn heart. She had accepted his worship so long as it chimed with her own inclination, but directly conflicting influences disturbed the even current, worldly prudence stepped in, and she cast his love aside, choosing the solid material things of this world in its stead.

To Jardine, her motive seemed so miserably inadequate, and betrayed a fickleness and shallowness of heart to which he could not close his eyes. Sometimes a sick longing came over him to leave the country where he had been so unhappy, to go far away and seek forgetfulness in other and wilder lands. Then other thoughts prevailed, and stubbornly he braced himself to do his work, and to mix with his fellows as heretofore. He looked ill and worn, so that those that knew him but little said:

"Jardine is burning the candle at both ends, and will have a break-down."

But he did not break down. He was older, more bitter, more cynical; not so even in his temper, less companionable; but he kept on doggedly fighting his trouble and defying it to crush him.

He heard from various sources that Mr. Talbot was a constant visitor at the Ludlows'. He still occasionally saw Mr. Ludlow, for he remained faithful to his scheme of forcing that gentleman to undo a little of the evil he had worked. Here a young man was fairly started in life, there an old couple were rescued from penury, a widow was set up in a suitable business, while the orphans were fed and clothed.

One evening he was hurrying along Fleet Street, scarcely heeding the cries of the newspaper boys, who were shouting at the top of their voices, "Great Bank Failure. Arrest of a Director!"

"Do you hear that, Mr. Jardine? But I suppose you know all about it," said some one, touching him on the shoulder.

It was Mr. Talbot. Jardine felt slightly surprised at being stopped, for though the two men had met frequently, it was natural, under the circumstance, that there could never be any cordiality between them.

"How d'ye do?" said Jardine, nodding carelessly. "What's up?"

"Do you mean to say you don't know that Ludlow has bolted, and that his precious partner Renforth is arrested?"

"Good heavens!" cried Jardine, his thoughts flying at once to Ida.

"Oh, come now, that's very well done, but I guess you suspected it months ago when you got out of it so neatly."

"You are mistaken," said Jardine haughtily. "I suspected nothing, and I don't understand to what you refer."

"To your engagement," replied Mr. Talbot, too excited to be abashed by the other's manner. "That old scamp has had me to the tune of more thousands than I care to think about, but, thank my stars, I am still a free man and there it ends. We've both of us reason to congratulate ourselves."

"Keep your congratulations for your own affairs and leave mine alone," said Jardine contemptuously, then turning on his heel he walked away. His thoughts were in a tumult, but one idea was clear: Ida must be protected from annoyance.

He bought a paper, but learnt nothing more than the bald facts which he already knew.

Acting on the spur of the moment, he hailed a hansom, and was driven to Berkeley Square. He asked for Mrs. Grace, and after some hesitation was admitted.

The poor woman's eyes were swollen, and she trembled with nervousness as she received him with an assumption of self-possession.

"Mrs. Grace, you and I were always friends," said Jardine, grasping her hand firmly in his, "and I have come to offer my services to you and to Miss Ludlow. Make use of me in any way you like, no matter how."

"I don't know what you or any one can do for us, I am sure, thank you all the same. But—oh, everything is so terrible!" and she burst again into tears.

Jardine stayed with her some time, doing what he could to console her. Ida, he learned, was in her room, being kept quiet by the doctor's orders.

Mr. Ludlow was never brought to account for his misdeeds. Long ago he had foreseen this day, and had laid his plans accordingly. How much money he had taken was never accurately known, but he left little behind him but inextricable confusion.

As far as possible, Jardine kept from Ida the details of her father's career. In

the whole miserable business there was only one thing he noted with pleasure, and that was how unconsciously she followed her aunt's lead, and turned to him at every point for help, for comfort, for advice.

With sensitive horror, both the ladies shrank from coming into contact with the outside world, and no one but himself knew how much Jardine saved them. As soon as possible he took them to a quiet little spot in Brittany, where their story was unknown, and where they could for a time live forgotten, and he hoped forgetting. Fortunately, Mrs. Grace's modest income had been so secured that her brother's greedy hands had been unable to grasp it, and but for this they would have been perfectly destitute.

During the many months Jardine was working for her, coming and going, and seeing her even after she had left England as often as he could, not a word had been spoken on the subject of their old engagement or its sudden rupture. Yet in this time of sorrow, when conventionality falls from people like a mask, they grew to know each other as they never could have done under ordinary circumstances.

Jardine found himself forgetting the reason of his rejection, and again putting on high this girl whom he had never really ceased to love. As for Ida, she found her mind but the battle-ground for conflicting feelings. She had always loved Jardine, and never so much as now, but while instinct prompted her to believe that he must be all that he seemed, she could not banish from her memory words of her father's which branded her lover with indelible infamy.

Summer had come round again, and nearly two years had passed since the day when each had vowed to love the other till death, and beyond the grave.

Again they were alone together, but divided by many a bitter memory and sorrow. The soft lap-lap of the waves on the beach on which they sat made a gentle accompaniment to their conversation; a conversation which had grown desultory and fitful, as it will with people whose hearts are full of thoughts they dare not utter.

"Sometimes lately, you look at me as though you were puzzled; what is it?" asked Jardine, turning suddenly and catching her eyes fixed on him.

Ida hesitated for a moment, and then she said: "I am wondering why you are so good to us."

"Surely that is not a thing to wonder at. I have never altered, Ida, and what I have done has been for love of you."

Jardine spoke simply and quietly, without any particular hope, but rather as one who desired not to worry her with protestations which might be unwelcome.

Ida knitted her brows together, and looked at him again with puzzled enquiry.

"I do not know what to believe," she said slowly.

"About what?" he asked.

"Did you never really suspect why I broke off our engagement?" she queried in turn.

"Was there any other reason than the one you gave me?"

She did not answer, but with averted face began pulling some seaweed from the rock on which she sat.

He took hold of her hand and repeated his question.

"I did it because you blackmailed my father," she said, almost in a whisper.

"What!" he cried, letting go her hand in his astonishment, and springing to his feet.

"Was it not true?" she said, with quivering lips. Either way it was bad for her; if true it proved her lover's disgrace, if false it placed her father in a still more despicable light.

"Good heavens! my poor little girl!" ejaculated Jardine, seating himself again by her side. "Now tell me exactly all he said."

"He told me that you had discovered some youthful peccadillo—those were his words—some youthful peccadillo of his which would cause him keen annoyance if talked about, and he had been weak enough to bribe you to hold your tongue, besides allowing you the run of his house; that finding too late that I had grown to—to love you, he had not interfered, but that you had shown yourself in your true colours by declining to let him settle any money on me, because you intended secretly to bleed him of the sum for your own purposes. At that my father, having first bound me to secrecy, determined to tell me the whole truth, and by making your obstinacy a pretext, break off our engagement."

"But," gasped Jardine, "what a baby you must have been to believe such a farago of nonsense!"

"I dare say," she said meekly, "but he showed me a letter of yours asking for one hundred and fifty pounds."

"He might have shown you several," said Jardine, "but probably the others made some mention of the purpose to which the money was to be put."

Then gently and tenderly, sparing the absent man as much as possible, Jardine told her the story of his father's ruin; of how he had tracked Mr. Ludlow down, and spared him for her sake; of the use he had made of the sums of money obtained from Mr. Ludlow; and of his own absolute refusal to participate in a shilling of the money acquired in so doubtful a manner.

By the time he had finished, Ida's face was hidden in her hands, and Jardine scarcely knew what to say by way of comfort.

"My dear," he said, "you must not take this to heart; rather is it not a good thing that these mists are cleared away, and that now we can bury the past for ever, and look forward to a new and happier future?"

"You have been so shamefully treated, that I wonder you can bear to look at me," she said.

"On the contrary, I want to look at you all my life," he answered.

"Can you ever really forgive me for behaving so badly?"

"I have more to forgive than that." She looked at him with startled, enquiring eyes.

"There is that flirtation with Talbot to be explained, you know. I heard all about it, though I never saw you."

"You need not be jealous. My father was always urging me to be civil to him, so that I was obliged to tolerate him."

"You are sure you never really cared about him?" persisted Jardine.

"I am sure that if I had never met you, I should never have known what love is," she said, and her answer dispelled the last cloud from Jardine's life.

THE SECOND PLACE.

BY ESMÈ STUART.

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"The Cowardice of Courage," etc.*

CHAPTER I.

COUNT JOZZI and Count Félix Kaplinski were strikingly unlike as they stood side by side in the doorway of Count Balinski's large reception hall, in which the guests were at this moment dancing a lively mazurka. This evening the brothers were, for a wonder, enjoying the same scene, and

both were admiring the two belles of Warsaw, Doris and Marya Balinski. It was an open secret in this year of 186— that these two were the most favoured among the suitors of the beautiful sisters.

"This evening shall decide my fate, Felix," said the light-hearted Jozsi, "and I advise you to try your luck at the same time."

"I have every intention of doing so," answered Felix gravely, as his eyes followed a soft cloud of white muslin which periodically passed before him.

"Suppose the old Count says no to us?" suggested Jozsi.

"Then I shall remain unmarried. The next dance is at hand, Jozsi; you had better go and seek your partner."

"If I were to stand and look on all the evening as you do, Felix, I should be mad with jealousy," replied Jozsi, laughing and moving off. "Your grave face, however, would frighten the bees from any flower if you stood by, so I doubt if the lively Doris will say yes."

When the ball was over, Count Balinski went to seek his two daughters in the small drawing-room, where they were eagerly talking of their partners with their aunt who had brought them up. The old man's face wore a slightly troubled expression, though at the same time a smile parted his lips as he looked at the two girls whose beauty was the talk of the town. He had every reason to be a proud father, for Doris at this moment looked like some sea-nymph in her white and silver dress. Doris was her father's darling, for though Marya was very nearly as beautiful she was much more shy and retiring than her lively sister.

"Well, children, I hope you have enjoyed your ball," said the Count. "I should prefer a quieter life, for such mad freaks always bring misfortune."

"And what misfortune makes you smile, little father?" said Doris, linking her hands round her father's arm. "It can't be a very serious one." Marya blushed as if she were a little conscious of the coming misfortune.

"This is the second time during the month that I have had to face somebody's lovers."

"Mine or Marya's, dear father?" said Doris, laughing.

"It is a double misfortune; but I must treat all these men alike, and send them about their business."

"And suppose we tried to guess the names?" said Doris.

"Fie, Doris!" said her aunt. "A Balinski does not throw herself at a suitor's head."

"Would it be better to say 'yes' blindly, dear aunt?" retorted the niece.

"Don't scold the child," said the Count, kissing the forehead over which the soft hair curled like miniature foam-waves. "Two suitors are persistent in their wish to win you, Doris; how am I to decide?"

"That is amusing. Now, dear aunt, have you not often boasted to us of your lovers; why must Marya and I be less fortunate? But Marya is wiser than I am, she will have a larger choice."

"At present my Marya has but one; but he, too, will take no refusal."

Marya's flush told plainly she knew the name of her lover.

"As for you, Doris, Prince Aivazowsky, the Russian, declares—"

Doris suddenly drew herself up like a wave that rises before striking the rocky shore.

"Never," she said, as she clenched her right hand. "I am a Polish nobleman's daughter. But what is the name of the other lover, papa?"

"Felix Kaplinski says—"

"What does Felix say?" Doris pretended to smooth down the soft muslin of her bodice, which looked like the plumage of a dove.

"Ah! Felix is like himself—proud, domineering, immovable. He says—"

"I have no patience with Felix's absurdities," said the aunt.

"Well, Felix says?" repeated Doris.

"That you must marry him."

Aunt Anna elevated head, eyes, and hands.

"And you answered, papa?"

"That no Balinski had ever done anything for a must."

Doris laughed again, such a joyous, ringing, soft laugh, which was terribly infectious.

"Well, then, that is a settled thing, papa. I shall be the first Balinski who does something for a must. In this case I shall be original."

"Indeed, papa, she must not marry him," says Marya eagerly, though in her sweet, low tones. "Papa, say no. Don't you see that she does not understand him? Jozsi says that his brother does not love Doris as much as—"

But Doris soon stopped her sister's words with kisses.

"Hush, you dear, foolish thing! We see

how Jozsi easily turns you round his little finger with his fine phrases. You and papa both know very well that I love Felix better than anybody in the world, and neither of you will say no to him. Besides, I know you quite well, papa; I believe that both these lovers are now waiting for us in the library, and that you have already said yes. Speak the truth, cunning little father."

The old Count laughed and his sister protested.

"Anyhow, Doris, I expect you to say no to Felix. It is quite true, he is too proud."

"How badly you pretend, papa! Your heart tells you I will marry no one but Felix. You might as well expect Marya to accept Vacsav Brozik as—"

"Well, well, come along. Modern days are bad days. Young people manage their parents. Ah, Doris, I wish you would have married that rich Englishman last year, and that he had taken you right out of our poor country."

Ten minutes later Doris was alone with Felix in the big library, for the impetuous Jozsi had disappeared with his Marya into the empty dancing-room, whilst the old Count had gone back to his sister to talk over the inevitable double wedding.

In the library the fire burnt low, for it was late. A suspended lamp swung gently to and fro, and the deep shadows lay athwart the far corners of the room. It was but this very partial light which served to illuminate the face that had the power to fascinate Doris. Her lover held her two hands in his, and for a few moments gazed at her in silence; at last he said :

"Doris, you have come to say yes."

"Yes," said Doris, almost under her breath. Her lover had not even kissed her, and she, this Doris who was admired by so many, would, had she dared, have fallen at his feet.

"Do you know what your 'yes' means, Doris? Do you know that I love you with a love strong and powerful, such as all the Kaplinski possess; that I would die for you without a murmur; that every hair of your head is sacred to me; that I have never looked at another woman since love for you entered into my heart when I was a mere lad? Do you know that, Doris? Tell me."

"Yes, Felix," she answered, "I know it."

"Do you know, too, that your happiness

is precious to me; that you need sunshine, and that, as my wife, you shall have it, even though I am grave and silent as all true Poles must be; but that I wish you to be happy in your own way. I shall love you only the more because of your bright laughter. You will never have to fear my jealousy—a hateful word between a man and his wife—because the woman I love, Doris, could not betray me. Do you understand?"

"Oh, Felix, the woman who loves you could not be false to you. I have never loved but you ever since the day when I was a girl, and you took my hand and asked me if I were a true woman. Felix, it was enough; you have known my heart was yours, though you have never said a word."

"Yes," he said, almost humbly. "Yes, Doris, I have known it, and it has made me what I am, strong in love."

"You never doubted me, did you?"

"Never once. But stop, Doris; that is not enough. Before we pledge ourselves I must tell you—you know it; but once, and once only we must speak of it to each other, then never again. Because I love you it is a secret between us, a secret of which you must not even think. You know how I love you, if no one else does; but, Doris, you know I love another still better. I love her with a love which is my life. I must do her bidding always; for her I must sacrifice what I love next best—you, Doris."

There was a low sob heard in the room.

"Hush—hush, Felix. I know it. You love her best, you are hers; but after her I am yours. I am content. I would rather be your second love, your slave, Felix, than the spoilt darling of any other."

"See, till I die her name must be always part of myself." He hastily pulled up his velvet coat-sleeve, and in the dim light displayed some tattooed letters on his arm. Doris stooped down and kissed the name of his beloved and her rival.

"Poland!" she said. "Felix, I know it."

"But when I am dead, then let them engrave the name of Doris upon me. Now, my love, it is not too late to draw back. Do you repent? I have hidden nothing from you."

Doris raised herself on tiptoe, and put her two arms round her lover's neck, and laid her head upon his breast.

"Felix, there is no drawing back; I am quite happy. I am your slave—and hers."

Then, and then only did Felix kiss his love's pure forehead, and Doris knew that all the love her hero could give her was hers, and she would not have exchanged it for a crown and a king.

When the four lovers met again, Doris was all sunshine and smiles, and no one but Felix could have guessed her capable of the scene she had just gone through. Shy, blushing Marya and her Jozsi had behaved in a much more extravagant manner, and as the sisters retired to bed she exclaimed :

"Doris, darling, I wish your lover were more like mine. Felix is so cold, so reserved, I don't believe he loves you half enough."

Doris only laughed as she answered :

"And I believe yours loves you too much—to last. At least he loves you too much to love Poland enough."

CHAPTER II.

SUCH a fête had never before been witnessed in the castle of the Kaplinski, just outside Warsaw ; and how the neighbourhood gossiped when the invitations were sent round ! By her own dependents the Countess Doris was adored, but evil tongues enjoy poisoning or trying to poison the sweetest lives. These evil speakers said the Count led a miserable life ; if he appeared at the splendid parties given by his young wife it was but to look gloomily jealous, and, indeed, said they, she preferred giving her entertainments without his help. That her conduct was suspicious was easily proved, for Count Jozsi and his wife no longer visited at the castle ; but the proverbial beauty of the Countess gathered together a host of adventurers.

Count Kaplinski's wife might be slandered, but her invitations were eagerly sought after, and her friends knew well enough that, with all her merriment and her balls and parties, Doris was as proud as the Kaplinski themselves, and what more could be said ?

"Prince Otto, you are not dancing. That is not allowed here. I have a young cousin who dances divinely ; let me introduce her to you."

"I would rather wait till—" began the Prince, with a look of admiration.

"Don't wait for me, if that is your desire. I am engaged for every dance."

"Every dance ?"

"Yes, when I dance them."

"And who is the fortunate individual ?"

"My cousin, Stanislas Radakowski."

"A mere youth from college," said the Prince, with a touch of scorn.

"Yes, that makes him all the more charming. It is his birthday, and he loves dancing passionately, and so do I. He does not think of his partner, only of his steps, so to dance with Stanislas is heaven !"

Doris had been married a year. A year ! It seemed at once like a day and a lifetime. Every moment had seemed precious to her, even though many of them had not been spent with Felix. On the contrary, he was much away ; but his wife never asked him any questions as to his movements. Her trust was perfect ; she knew that, when it was possible, he was with her.

This very morning he had gravely kissed her lips, and she had trembled a little. He did that so seldom. He had said but two words, but they had echoed all day in her ears : "Doris, my wife." That from Felix meant such worlds of trust and love. She—light-hearted, merry Doris—had succeeded in making Felix happy, and that was enough happiness for her. All others were as trampled dust compared with Felix.

Young Stanislas suddenly recalled her from her reverie.

"Cousin Doris, just one more dance with you. You dance nearly as well as Bettina."

"Who may she be ?"

"My Italian master's daughter. She is—"

"Silly boy ! She is not as beautiful as I am, and cannot dance half as well. I will give you this dance on condition that you do not flirt again with Bettina. Remember you are a Balinski."

Stanislas hesitated, then he looked at Doris.

"Cousin Doris, you are right ; I have been a fool. Well, let us dance."

It was half-past eleven when Stanislas went to cool himself in a conservatory, and overheard these scraps of conversation :

"The Rzad has decreed it, and that council takes no excuse.—The Sileczki are chosen by lot, there is no appeal against that choice.—No one knows friends from foes ; the Russians have spies everywhere.—Yes, but Nieroslawski is bidding his time, in the meanwhile his friends must do the work.—And suffer for it. Well, my patriotism does not go so far.—Then the flight is a high one this time ?—So they say."

Just at a quarter to twelve Stanislas pushed his way through the crowd till he was close to Doris.

"Cousin Doris," he whispered. "Come here."

"Where?"

"In the new conservatory. A man wants to see you there."

"A man! Let him wait." But Stanislas took her arm as if to waltz with her.

"Hush, say nothing, but follow me."

She followed him, clenching her right hand, a way she had of showing her secret displeasure. What man dared send for her?

"Here he is," said Stanislas; then he whispered: "He is one of the Stiletzki."

Doris became calm and composed. She had once before seen this short, dark individual walking with her husband.

"Speak quickly," she said; "my guests are waiting for me."

"The Count sends you this note. You are to read it alone in my presence."

"Go, Stanislas," she said firmly. "I must do exactly as Felix tells me. He will be back very soon now. Why does he write?"

She unfolded a tiny note and read:

"Poland. Remember—we have failed. I am taken sword in hand. Reward the messenger. Doris—my wife."

This was all, and the messenger had risked his life in bringing it to her.

Doris stood quite still for a moment as if she had been a lovely statue. There was not one tinge of colour on her cheeks, and her hands were like ice to the touch.

Then suddenly life rushed back. She raised her hands, unclasped a diamond brooch from her bosom, and plunged the pin into her soft white arm; then she let the red drops fall on the other half of the paper. Tearing this off, she handed it and the brooch to the man before her.

"Take them; the brooch is valuable. Give this paper to my husband if it is possible. He will understand. Stanislas!" she called, and Stanislas came hastily to her side.

"Cousin Doris, I know; the news has come. Don't go back there; all the people are hastening away. They are afraid of being found here."

Doris actually smiled.

"So much the better, I need not dismiss them. Take this key of the small back gate and let out the messenger; then leave me. I shall go to Warsaw to-night."

But the messenger stopped her.

"For the love of your husband do not show yourself in Warsaw. The trial is taking place this evening; there will be no justice shown, there is none for our unhappy country."

Doris waved him away imperiously. Even before she got back to the hall it was empty, for to be found in the house of a conspirator might mean death or exile. For a moment the young Countess stood alone in the big hall full of lights and flowers, and, looking up, she saw her own figure reflected in a large mirror, round which beautiful exotics were grouped. She raised her arms and clasped her hands over her head as if to ease some physical pain, but in truth she was quickly making her plans and deciding what line to follow. Suddenly she dropped her arms and murmured almost unconsciously, "Doris, my wife." She had no more time for thought, for she had much to do. Running upstairs with the light step that for the last year had sounded like music to Felix, she rang for her maid.

"Make haste, Nicoline, fetch me your dark pelisse; no one must know me."

"Ah, madam," said Nicoline, bursting into tears, "we know—every one knows the noble Count is a prisoner."

"The Count has done his duty, and now I must do mine. Come with me; we have much to do. If influence can avail, there is yet hope. If my father were well—but he is ill, and has lost his memory—he cannot help me."

By ten o'clock the next morning the fate of the conspirators was known. They were to receive no mercy. The suspected ringleader was not to be found, but three of the foremost members of the secret council, among whom was Felix, were to be led to one of the public squares and there hanged on a gibbet. They were to walk to the place of execution barefooted, in their shirts, and a black veil thrown over them, in this manner undergoing the same death as a parricide.

"Nicoline, do you understand?" said Doris, for one moment breaking down. "They are going to kill my husband! They will not even grant him a hero's death; they will not listen to me. I have but one hope left, I must go to Prince Avazowsky."

"You will not go to him, dear mistress!" said Nicoline, who had always lived with Doris.

"I must go. Bring me my velvet dress

and make me beautiful, Nicoline. The wife of Felix Kaplinski must be fittingly dressed."

Nicoline had but to obey, and very soon the two women again started for Warsaw in a closed carriage.

It was a lovely summer's morning. The Prince was reclining in the verandah of his country house—once the residence of a Polish nobleman—when his servant announced that the Countess Kaplinski desired to speak to him. The Prince rose quickly, and threw away his cigar. He had guessed Doris would come, and he was going to revenge himself for the past. He walked into his reception-room, and found her standing by a large arm-chair. Her hand was resting on the back of it, and she looked very beautiful, with a bright colour in her cheeks.

"You know all," said Doris; "I do not, for the Count never spoke to me of his affairs, but I have come to you, Prince, to ask you to save him. You know he is a patriot whose name will live; you cannot let him die. You must speak to the Czar; you must."

Perhaps Doris had never looked more lovely than at this moment. The Prince resolutely turned his eyes away.

"Forgive plain speaking, Countess Kaplinski, but I cannot save your husband. He is a traitor to the Czar. If you had been wise you would have kept him out of politics, and for your sake most men would discard visions."

"I married him because he would not discard them," said Doris proudly.

The Prince shrugged his shoulders.

"Then you must accept the consequence."

Doris, with a spontaneous motion, held out her hands as if to emphasize her words.

"No, I cannot, I cannot, Prince. Listen. You said once you loved me. Was it me you loved, or merely my beauty? Don't you see that I loved Felix with a love that prevented my thinking of any one else? If you had married me, you would have married a woman without a soul. My soul must have gone wherever Felix was. It is with him now; it is in his prison; I see him as plainly as I see you; I see his dear face, brave and resolute as ever. He is thinking of me, but he thinks first of Poland. I have told you this because you will understand. You have a noble nature, though sometimes you hide it away. I must go, I have much

to do, but my pleading will ring day and night in your ears as long as Felix is alive; and if he dies, and you have done nothing for him, then, Prince Alvazowsky, you and I can never meet again, not even in heaven."

The Prince stooped and kissed her hand, as was customary, but he said nothing as Doris retired, to find her faithful maid waiting for her below.

"Now, Nicoline, take me to your mother. No one must know where I am."

Nicoline's mother was a washerwoman just outside the town. The carriage drove right through Warsaw, crossing the great Place Sigismund, adorned with its colossal statue, and going towards the Zameck, that royal castle overlooking the town, paused at the foot of the hill. There the two women got down, and now no one would have recognized Doris attired in a peasant's petticoat, and with her beautiful face stained with walnut-juice and hidden by a hood.

When they reached the washerwoman's miserable dwarek, Nicoline introduced the Countess, and bade her mother keep the secret.

"Do not be afraid of me," said Doris, with a smile. "I have come to work for a week. I must wash and iron, so that at the end of that time no one shall recognise my hands, or suspect I am Doris Kaplinski, and then I shall mix with the people and see him again if—"

She was not brave enough to finish. Deep down in her heart she knew there was hardly a shadow of hope for Felix, but she must see him once more.

So she patiently stood at the wash-tub and learnt to scrub. Nicoline dared not stay all day, because of the neighbours, but she came every evening to undress her mistress, and to make her as comfortable as was possible in the cottage; but Doris seemed only anxious about the roughness of her hands, and how to procure old clothes from the Jews' quarter. The women who came into the dwarek gossiped about the prisoners without lowering their voices, for they had the impression that the new girl helper was deaf and dumb. She never spoke, so the idea was easy to keep up. For Doris the days dragged on, sometimes slowly, at other times the minutes seemed to fly. All night, lying in her poor bed, she would moan softly to herself; sometimes she tried to pray, but there was only one word she could say—"Felix."

The crowd gathered thickly along the streets where the procession of patriots going to their doom was known to be coming. The officials had placed mounted soldiers to push back the too eager citizens, but like flies on a dead carcase they gathered again immediately. Foremost among them was Doris, looking like some gipsy peasant. She could not be driven away. The awful gibbet erected in the Square of Sigismund fascinated her, for she must see him once more, even if only for a moment; even if only to call him by his name. He must look at her; he would know her through any disguise.

Suddenly a murmur arose. They were coming; the procession of shame was approaching. Doris pressed forward, heedless of the rough men who elbowed her, heedless even of the cries of "For shame! For shame! Brothers, let us rescue them."

"Clear the place!" cried an officer, dashing up on horseback, and speaking to an aide-de-camp. "If they attempt a rescue we shall be ruined."

There was a stampede. No crowd can withstand horses' hoofs. Driven back by force into a side street, Doris paused for an instant, then rushed forward again. She pushed her way to the front row; there she half saw some black moving figures, and held out her arms towards them, but a fierce voice called out:

"Back, there, impudent hussy! Traitors want no sympathy!"

"Let me go, let me go," cried Doris frantically. "I must see them."

"Must!" He rode straight at her, and with a cry Doris fell; but as she fell she caught sight of a tall figure draped in black, a rope round his neck, and bare, bruised feet.

"Felix!" she called, and again she stretched out her arms, and then remembered no more, for she fainted dead away.

A long time after some one fell over her, and she opened her eyes.

"What's this? Get up, girl. What, drunk at midday? For shame!"

"For Heaven's sake, tell me, is it over? Am I too late?"

"Too late! Over! Why, yes, an hour ago. The brave men never flinched; they mounted the steps of the scaffold without a word."

"All of them?"

"Ay. Count Kaplinski was the last and the proudest. He gazed round as if looking for—"

Doris stared hard at the speaker.

"Go on," she said.

"He wanted to speak, but the executioner seized him."

"How dared he touch him!"

Doris's lips were deadly pale.

"The hangman gave the sign—"

Doris rose to her feet and proudly raised her head as she said:

"I know the Count never uttered a word, he never made one struggle. You lie if you say the contrary!"

"That's true, never a word, but at the moment of death—"

"He called for his wife and she was not there. Oh, Heaven!"

"I couldn't hear what he called for, but suddenly the Russian Prince Aivazowsky rode up and waved a letter to stop the execution. The Czar had reprieved the prisoner—not death, but exile to Siberia. Faith, I wouldn't have changed."

"Not death! Not death!" cried Doris, throwing back her hood. "Say it again."

"Yes, not death; but they say the Count murmured: 'It was easier to come here than to go there'—but, merciful heavens, what is the matter?"

"Not death—not death, but—but—" Doris fell back, still muttering, "not death, but—"

"Siberia," repeated the stranger.

Happily Nicoline, who had been looking everywhere for her mistress, ran up at this moment crying out:

"Have you heard, dear mistress, have you heard?"

Doris actually laughed.

"Quick, Nicoline, give me your arm. Do you hear, girl—not death but exile? What is exile when a man has a wife? He knows that, Nicoline. Say it again."

CHAPTER III.

IT was bitterly cold, and the chain of prisoners was long. As they walked, their chains rattled and clanked against each other. Occasionally there was a long track of blood fallen from wounded hands and feet. They were well guarded by soldiers, who hounded them on with blows and curses, when they themselves were feeling chilly. Sometimes the living chain had to drag a dead companion in its midst till the next station was reached. At each post the soldiers were changed for fear of treason, or in case one of them possessed a human heart. The escape of any prisoner was death to the chief guard, so an escape

was very rare. From Varsovie to Vakutsk the track is long, a trail of horror, a pathway of disgrace to common humanity. But in that very pathway, a few hours behind the prisoners, Doris, disguised as a peasant, and accompanied by the faithful Nicoline, followed her husband. They did not dare approach nearer, and they would not lose sight of the path. At each dreary station or fortress Doris said :

"Felix has been here; he has seen these walls. Does he guess I am following him?"

Doris had sold her jewels, and brought with her all the ready money she could procure at a moment's notice. Her fortune and his were confiscated; she was a beggar now, following a beggar, but that did not trouble her very much. Felix was alive. At times the two women found the inn guarded by a soldier, for somewhere within was a prisoner who could not be dragged forward. Sometimes this laggard had become a raving lunatic, but the end was never far off when they were thus left behind. The first time Doris found this laggard she had to face another horror. At the next station she might hear that it was Felix who could not proceed, or rather not Felix but Number ninety-nine, for by dint of bribing she had discovered this number.

At length the journey was over. Doris never remembered how long it lasted, but all the weary time she had kept a few hours behind the trail of prisoners. Never once had she given in, and now she had come to a stand-still, and could look at the gloomy fortress where the political prisoners were to be incarcerated, and from which, by-and-by, they were daily to be driven out like cattle, to work in the mines or in the forest.

The first night Doris and Nicoline found shelter in a miserable kwass shop. The master of it gave them a back room which was dark and dirty. He even warned them that women were not allowed in the place, unless they had some occupation. The officials would soon find it out and make enquiries.

"We are looking for work; but, indeed, little father, we must rest a short while," and then Doris gave him one of her smiles. "Tell me what hour the prisoners come out of the fortress?"

The man looked at her from under his small brows, and understood.

"That is easily known, for when they come out I lodge a soldier here for fear of any escape on this side. It is not safe for you to lodge here; but my cousin wants

two helpers in the bakehouse. She bakes the bread for the prisoners. If you like I will speak to her."

Doris had a way of winning hearts; and now she pressed a small diamond earring into his hand.

"Holy Mother!" he murmured, turning pale with fear. "What good is this to me? We must take no bribes." But Doris insisted, and the man earned it well this time.

His cousin took the two strangers into her service, and asked no questions.

One day the kwass seller ran into the bakehouse.

"Lend me the services of your girl, Sacha. I cannot get any help to-day."

And Doris went.

"To-day the prisoners are coming out, lady," he whispered. "You must stand at the door and help to wash glasses. You must use your eyes, not your tongue. That is all I can do for you. By-and-by they will be less strict, and this governor is not a hard man as governors go."

Doris washed glass after glass as if in a dream, forming but one resolution. She must be brave; she must not run him into danger.

Suddenly the great gate of the fortress swung back, there were sounds of chains, and as the prisoners passed out they struck up a sad Polish national song, for, as a great privilege, they might sing on the way to the mines.

Doris forced herself to look up. Her heart beat so wildly that the blood seemed to rush to her eyes and to blur her sight, but in a moment she controlled herself.

There he was, the second in the line; Felix, her husband, her hero!

She dropped a glass, and he turned his head towards her. Their eyes met, the colour suffused his pale face, his lips moved, and Doris knew that he said "Doris, my wife," and she—she wanted to stretch out her arms to him and to fall at his feet; but she only went on washing glasses.

That day she went home quite beside herself with joy.

For six months she had that occasional joy. She was not always spared, but when their eyes met she came bounding back to her servitude with a happy laugh.

After a time she found out her laugh made Felix smile, so she laughed when they met, and she knew that Felix for one moment felt happy; then her own happiness seemed almost too great for words.

Gradually things improved. Somehow

the story of her devotion leaked out, and it found favour with the governor. She obtained leave to rent a tiny cabin on the settlement. It was on the road to the mines, so she could see Felix regularly. She began to make soup to sell to the convicts as they passed by, for now and then they were allowed to buy food; and in the wooden bowl she handed to Felix she sometimes dropped a tiny pellet of paper, which Felix kept in his mouth till he could read it unseen. These were red-letter days, even though he would never answer her. He dared not, for her sake.

Life became quite exciting then, for Doris had many letters to write; petitions to send for Felix—petitions which he would never have allowed her to send, had he known. Nicoline had gone home to her mother, who was ill. She had been able to send her home in grander style than she came; dear good Nicoline, Marya must look after her. She was now alone in her cabin; but she saw Felix every day, and she lived on hope. It was almost sweet.

Poor Doris, she lived on hope many days. The case of Count Felix, they said, was one which the clemency of the Czar was not allowed to touch; but still Doris wrote and petitioned. Now and then Marya begged she might send her some money, but Doris never would allow this. Marya's husband was a traitor to the cause; besides, she, Doris, was the wife of Felix, and would not live on charity. Then, money could do so little for her. She had learnt to make such nice things, and the settlers were glad to become her customers. Some of these settlers were released convicts who yet might not go home; and Doris became the angel of the place, and as safe in the dreary plain as if she had been guarded by a regiment.

Then better times dawned, though never an answer to her petitions.

A new governor was appointed, and he heard her story. She no longer disguised herself now, though she still dressed as a peasant, not being able to afford anything better. Felix looked so happy when he saw her sweet face, and the few words they exchanged were chiefly about their looks.

"My heart's darling," she whispered, or sometimes wrote, "you are pale to-day; are you ill?" And he would smile and say: "When I see the colour in your face, Doris, I feel well again."

Doris was not taken in; she knew the iron had entered into his soul.

Five years had passed in hope, and then

one day a great joy came to them. On the great fête days the prisoners of five years' standing might see their friends alone for a few hours. Doris thought she should go mad with joy the night before the event took place; but her heart was cruelly torn when she was ushered into the prisoner's cell.

Still, their first meeting alone, how sweet it was! They could not speak, and for a few minutes Doris cried a little, as Felix gathered her to his arms and whispered:

"Doris, my wife, it was for her—for Poland. Can you forgive me?"

"I am satisfied," she said. "I would not have it otherwise."

The next five years fled much more quickly, and still Doris wrote and wrote. She only asked for freedom, not for money or for lands.

But no answer came.

One day, however, the governor sent for her to his room, and she quickly appeared before him. She was so young still, only twenty-nine, and she looked younger, and oh, so beautiful! The governor wondered, as he looked at her, how she could live this life of hardship.

"Are you the wife of Ninety-nine?" he said roughly.

"I am the wife of Count Felix Kaplinski," she said proudly, and never in the old days had she looked more beautiful.

"We have no titles in Siberia, but I have a letter about Number ninety-nine. Our gracious Czar allows Number ninety-nine to dwell unchained in a separate cabin. The settlement is guarded, you know. Flight is impossible. Further, Number ninety-nine will be allowed to work in the forest instead of in the mines."

Doris laughed, her joy was so great. She knew too much about the mines.

"Thank you," she said. "Doris, the wife of Count Felix, thanks you."

The governor bowed; he was conquered—for the moment, at least.

Felix Kaplinski woke up one day to a new life. It was evening when the soldiers struck off his chains near the cabin door, and one said roughly:

"Well, laggard, can't you go on? Come, march; why do you stand stock still like an idiot?"

They gave him a rude push as they walked off. Felix said nothing, but his hand trembled as he knocked at the door.

Doris had not known the hour of his

coming. She had waited for him all day long, and she had sold her last ornament to buy him a feast. Then she waited.

Felix was coming home! Home; he had a home now! She clasped her hands over her heart to stop its beating. Then she knelt down and prayed. It was the first time she had prayed any words in all these ten long years; before this she had knelt, and sometimes she had cried, once or twice she had laughed; but she had never spoken to Heaven till this evening when she was waiting for Felix.

Felix was coming home! He would be, within these poor walls, a free man, free to love her, to call her by her name; and she could kneel by him and kiss the wounds the cruel iron had made. She would comfort him, and she would be merry, oh, so merry! He would say her laugh was his sunshine. She would make up to him for his long suffering. Ten years, ten years. How many weeks was that? How much he had had to bear all that time! He had done it for her, his other love, for Poland. Was not that enough? Felix was a hero; no, the word was too common to be given to such as he. He had never flinched, never wavered, never once complained. He had loved her as truly as only Felix could love. But now all was changed. He would be happy for half the twenty-four hours; he would be free. Very few men were really happy for twelve hours out of every twenty-four, and none of the men who had helped to send Felix could have one minute's ease of mind in the whole day. As for her, she must take care not to think of herself, she must not be selfish. Felix must come first. He would be very weary, he would want time to sit still and think. His dear face lately had been so pale, his dear hands had trembled as she held them, his smile had been forced in order to give her pleasure. He was getting too weary to smile. Oh, she would not mind, she would laugh for them both. The settlement would call her the merry exile. They had done so before now, but they did not know her really; they could not guess all the joy that was in her heart to-day!

When would he come? It was getting late, and it was cold. She heaped up the logs in the stove. Marya's last fête gift was doubly welcome now. Doris only accepted this present on her fête day because it made poor Marya happy, and Felix need not know.

Then suddenly came the expected knock, a feeble knock, a knock as if a ghost had tapped with its shadowy fingers, and Doris flew to the door, bidding herself be quiet for her husband's sake.

"Felix, Felix! you are here. Come in. See, everything is ready for you, my darling. It is your house, our home. Look, isn't it a palace?"

He entered slowly and stood on the threshold of the poor little place, full chiefly of the stove warmth, of the light from the small oil lamp, and of the love of Doris.

Felix shut the door, and slowly walked towards the arm-chair he saw placed by the fire. His once strong, fine, manly form was bent as if with old age. As he sat down he looked timidly round the room without saying a word. Oh, Doris knew, Doris knew. She had made friends with other exiles, other half-released captives. That was the worst of all those long ten years, they had made Felix timid; Felix, who had once had no power of understanding the word fear!

She knelt down beside him and began taking off his thick boots. Her fingers were hard now, for the Doris of old days could not have unlaced these strips of cowhide; but this Doris could do so, and she was glad of it, glad that she was strong as well as gentle, glad that she knew the meaning of work, of poverty, and of sorrow. The Doris of nineteen could have had no part in the Felix that now sat beside the stove. She took his cold feet in her arms and rubbed them warm, and kissed them where the iron manacles had once galled, then hardened, the flesh. Then she ran to fetch his slippers and a rug, and laughingly kissed each of his rough fingers, from which all manly beauty had fled.

And Felix let her do it all and said nothing; but Doris knew that he could not yet speak. He must have time to think.

Then she again rose and drew the little deal table close to him, and ran singing into the tiny kitchen to bring him some of her famous soup; and on the table she laid two plates, and two wooden spoons, and some hot kwass and roasted potatoes long ago stored for this very occasion. All the while she talked on, any wild rubbish that came into her head, and laughed over the want of some old luxuries.

"But look, my Felix, I have got two

of everything, one for you and one for me ; and what more can we want ? And look, dear heart, here is a letter for you, directed to you ; it came enclosed in one of my letters."

She put it close beside him, and his poor numb fingers touched it strangely. He looked at the direction, half shook his head, and did not open it.

" Number ninety-nine," he murmured. He had never had a letter all these long years, and it could not be meant for him. But Doris knew. By-and-by he would understand that—that he was Count Felix Kaplinski. After a time she said :

" Now, Felix, all is ready. Will you ask the blessing ? Why, you—we haven't sat down to such a dinner for—years, have we ? Do you remember Luskina, our cook ? Clever as he was, was his soup like mine ? I can compete with any one now ! Taste it, dear Felix."

He took a spoonful, then looked round, and then he took another.

" It is very good, Doris ; better than Luskina's soup."

" Didn't I tell you so, Felix ?" and Doris laughed her old merry laugh, and Felix smiled. Oh, Heaven ! how that smile did her good !

Afterwards Doris cleared away the meal and came and sat down by Felix, close beside him on a stool, and she put his hand round her neck and kissed it till the kisses seemed to enter into his soul, and he returned the pressure.

Doris felt her heart beat wildly then, for Felix was beginning to live.

Suddenly the cat, who had been sleeping soundly, woke up and stretched himself and gazed curiously at the intruder, arching his back at him. This cat had been Doris's only companion for so long that it felt jealous of the stranger, and Doris explained the fact to Felix, and he, stooping down, lifted the animal into his lap and stroked its warm coat.

" Is it your cat, Doris ?" he said.

" No, no, Felix, not mine, it is our cat."

" Our cat," he replied. " Do you think they will let us keep it ?"

Doris nearly cried at these words, but to prevent herself doing this she jumped up again and began preparations for going to bed. The big bed in the corner there, she had bought it little by little. First the wooden frame, then the straw mattress, then the feather bed, all with a view to Felix's first night at home.

" Felix," she said, " Felix, my darling,

you must come to bed and rest. Don't think of anything but what is for your good. You have been wanting rest a long time."

" Yes, a long time," he said.

" But it will be all the sweeter now. There wasn't a bed like this one in all—"

She paused, for she saw her husband's eyes fixed on her as if waiting for the next word, so she coughed and never finished the sentence.

Darkness fell on the settlement of exiles, and the wide snow mantle over Siberia glistened in the moonlight. The great forest rested from its labours, and the rivers were silenced by the embraces of the ice-maidens.

In the exile's cabin the moonlight passed in through a slit in the curtain, and played upon the big bed which Doris had bought piece by piece. It lighted up the face of Felix and woke him. He looked round the room and noticed the hanging lamp still burning, and the truth flashed suddenly upon him. He was in a home of his own. He turned in his bed and saw Doris, who had fallen asleep ; and then Felix became conscious that she was firmly clasping one of his hands. The cat snored softly by the stove, and he remembered. A great joy entered into his heart, and he called his wife softly by her name.

" Doris ! "

Doris did not wake, for she had been so weary with work.

" Doris ! " he called again, and sat up a little to gaze on her face.

Still she did not wake, and then the exile released his hand and slowly pulled up his sleeve, and with his finger traced the tattooed letters on his arm.

" Doris," he called again, and Doris started up.

" Oh, my darling, what is the matter ?" she said. " You are at home ; no one can hurt you."

" At home ; yes—yes. Doris, my wife, look." He held his bare arm towards her.

" Yes, my Felix, I know it. It is the name of her whom you have loved so long —so long, all this time. You have been so true—so true. Oh, Felix, there is no one like you in all the world."

He put his arm round her and realised that she was his. He had not realised it last night ; but now his heart beat fast and it seemed to suffocate him.

" Doris."

" Yes, Felix darling."

"When I die let them put your name here, on my heart."

He drew her shining head down upon his breast and gave a little sigh, such a soft, happy, contented little sigh!

"If you please, your Excellency," said the head official at the fortress the next morning, "if you please, Number ninety-nine died last night. They often do when they are liberated. It is best to keep them their full term."

JIM GODDART'S PROMISE.

By the Author of "*Count Paolo's Ring*," "*The Story of Doris Cairnes*," etc.

CHAPTER I.

"YES, they are both down with the fever, Jim, both father and sweetheart, and a pretty smart touch of it too, I fancy. I met Miss Pert just now in the street. She could speak to me to-day fast enough when she wanted something," and Miss Belle Sutton, the buxom barmaid who presided over the canteen at Kuranda Camp, tossed her befrizzled head defiantly; "and she told me so, and asked me if there was a doctor in the camp, and when I told her the nearest doctor was at Cronje, four hours' ride off, she had the cheek to ask me to tell her of some one who would go to bring him. Fancy that, Jim, and on Christmas Eve of all nights in the year!"

"What did you say?"

"I laughed at her, of course. 'I don't think the boys would stir out of camp for any one to-night,' I said, 'and certainly not for people like you, who treat everybody like the dust under your feet, and are too high and mighty and virtuous to associate with any of us poor sinners!' I had her there, eh, Jim?"

"Decidedly, my dear. If to love your neighbours is a Christian maxim, to hate your enemies is one of an equally meritorious character, beside being infinitely more attractive to the carnal mind; and people who profess to be better than their neighbours are one's natural enemies," Jim replied placidly. "And what did Miss —Miss Pert say to that?"

"Oh, she looked at me out of her great saucer eyes, and her lips twitched as if she were going to cry—great baby—then, 'Do you really mean that there is no one in all the camp with sufficient humanity to help two sick, perhaps dying, men, and a

helpless girl?' she said. 'That's just as you like to put it, my lady,' I says. 'You've held yourself aloof from us all, and looked down upon us, and now you'll find you can't drop and pick us up again and use us just when you think fit; you haven't a friend in the camp now.' She didn't say anything to that—just coloured up and tossed her head and walked away. I guess she didn't like to hear the plain truths. By the way, Jim, I didn't think of you; you used to be a great friend of theirs at one time."

"Ay, I was when they first came to the camp," Jim replied in his lazy, reflective voice, "before they knew me intimately. When they thoroughly understood the high-toned, exalted nature of my character, they were content to admire it and me from a distance. Give me another whisky, Belle."

Belle laughed as she refilled the empty glass. She glanced with admiring eyes at Jim Goddard as he leaned against the door-post, looking meditatively down the straggling row of wooden shanties and tents of which the camp consisted, and on which the sunset light was shining. She laughed and went on with her idle chatter, and Jim answered mechanically now and then, but he scarcely heard what she said. He was looking intently towards a clump of trees just outside the camp, under which, by the side of a waggon, a tent was pitched. Within that tent he knew the two men of whom Belle had spoken lay, stricken by the terrible fever which a few weeks before had wrought fearful havoc in the little camp. They were lying there suffering, perhaps—for he knew the deadly nature of the fever too well—dying; and the girl who was the daughter of one man and promised wife of the other, was watching by them alone. Somehow, though Jim tried to harden his heart, he did not like to think of it; to picture the blue eyes, which had once smiled so frankly and sweetly into his own, dimmed with tears, aching with long hours of anxious vigil; to imagine that sunny head bowed under the burden of anxiety.

He tried to turn his thoughts to other subjects, but they went back persistently to the time when Mr. Clifton and his daughter Lois, and her lover, Frank Wyverne, first came to the camp. He had made their acquaintance, and had been of some slight service to them on the first evening of their arrival, and they, attracted by the pleasant, courteous manner

which Jim could assume at will, had made him welcome to their shanty. He recalled the pleasant evenings he had spent there, the afternoons when he had returned earlier than usual from work, and as he passed the Cliftons' shanty had lingered under the trees where Lois generally passed the afternoon with her work or book, and spent a pleasant time with her alone. Those quiet tête-à-têtes had been very sweet to him, perilously sweet, considering that Lois was the promised wife of another man, and that even if she had been free she could never be anything to him; as well expect the millennium to come at once, and the lion to lie down with the lamb, as expect Lois—sweet, innocent Lois—to mate with one like him, Jim told himself savagely.

For a week or ten days the friendship, which was so pleasant to all, but especially so to Lois and Jim, had continued, and then one day Mr. Clifton had gone to his daughter, and told her gravely and decided that it must cease; that a man who bore the reputation which Jim Goddard had earned for himself, even in a place where the standard of morality was not pitched unduly high, was no fit friend for her.

Lois was too much in awe of her father to rebel, or to make any open remonstrance, and when she ventured to speak to her lover on the subject, and found that he held the same views as her father, she reluctantly submitted to the stern decree which bade her regard Jim Goddard as a stranger. She deserted her seat under the trees, and the next time they met, and he stopped to speak to her, she had hurried on with a slight bend of her head, and flushed cheeks, and averted eyes.

Jim had looked after her, and had first sworn a deep oath to himself, and then laughed harshly; but he was not the man to force his presence where it was unwelcome—he could take a hint as well as any one—so he came no more to the shanty, and on the few occasions when he met Lois had passed her with a distant, courteous bow.

It was better so, he told himself. Sometimes in her presence he was tempted to forget that he was—what he had made himself; to forget that dark time of youthful folly, that moment of madness which had spoiled his life, and brought his father's curse upon his head; to forget all this, and the wild, reckless life to which it had been the prelude. Lois was no fit company for him; like must mate with

like. Let him keep to his own kind; his place was in the bar with the noisy revellers who crowded thence after working hours were over, to drink and gamble, not under the soft starlight by the side of that dove-eyed girl, with her sweet face and her low voice.

But though he told himself all this, and mentally acquiesced in the wisdom of Mr. Clifton's decision, he none the less resented it, and had even once or twice, when Miss Clifton's name had been slightly mentioned in his presence, laughed and sneered with the rest, and had been moved the moment afterwards to fierce, unreasoning hatred, both of the one who had made the sneering remark, and of himself, who had laughed at it. Often enough he wished that their paths had never crossed; that he had never known her, never looked into the depth of those blue eyes, or seen the bright flush which sometimes at his eager gaze would rise in her cheeks; never pictured to himself how fair life might be if she had been free to be won, and he had dared to win her. But since this was impossible, and since she had elected that their friendship should come to an untimely end, Jim was too proud to try to alter the decision. A friendship which could so easily, and at the first breath of opposition, be put aside, was not worth keeping. Let it go!

But though he had told this to himself, and had determined to put her altogether out of his life and memory, to go back to his old life and friends, and to be content with Miss Belle Sutton's society, his efforts had not been quite so successful as he could have wished; and now the unexpected news which Belle had given him, had raised a tumult of mingled emotions in his mind. Angry though he was with Lois, and though he had mentally called her fickle and weak, and many another hard name, and sworn to himself that she had only herself to blame, that he would have been a true friend to her if she had not willed it otherwise, he did not like to think of her alone in her trouble; to fancy those blue eyes dim with weeping and watching by the sick men, that sweet face growing pale and haggard with anxiety and sleepless vigils.

"Well, aren't you going down to offer your services to Miss Pert, Jim? She'll be ready enough to welcome you now, in spite of the cold shoulder she's turned to you lately," she said.

Jim looked at her blandly, and smiled.

"I dare say she would," he said slowly. "I guess I'll give her the chance, anyhow."

"You will?"

Belle's cheeks flamed, and her eyes flashed with angry surprise.

"Well, I thought you had more spirit, Jim," she said, with an angry jingle of the glasses on the counter. "I'd have more pride if I were you! I'd show her she couldn't drop me and whistle me back at her pleasure!"

"I don't doubt it, my love. In that respect, as in many others, your sex is vastly superior to ours," Jim answered in his aggravatingly cool voice; and then he took up his hat, and, putting it on, turned to the door. "By the way, Belle, have you any drinkable 'fizz' left? I don't mean the fiery decoction you sell to the boys, but any of that case I brought back with me the last time I went to Maritzburg."

"I believe there are two or three bottles."

"Hand a couple over, then."

Jim tucked the champagne under his arm, and with a careless nod, and a supreme disregard of Miss Belle's angry looks, which exasperated her afresh, went out of the bar, and walked quickly down the street till he reached the Cliftons' shanty. The door stood open, and he paused, and unseen by the pale watcher who sat by her father's bed sponging his burning hands and brow with cool water, and listening to his incoherent mutterings, looked on for a moment in silence, then gently tapped at the door.

Lois started and turned suddenly round; then as she recognised the new-comer, a hot, crimson blush flamed into her pale cheek, and into the blue eyes a curious light of hope and relief and confusion leapt up as she looked eagerly at him.

"Mr. Goddart! Oh, is it really you?" she said; and at the surprise and delight in her voice all the bitterness and hardness died suddenly out of Jim's heart. He put the champagne carefully on the table, and took the timidly offered hand.

"Yes. I only heard half an hour ago that you were in trouble," he said kindly. "I came to see if I could be of any use, or do anything for you."

"Use! Oh, I think you have come just in time to save me from despair," Lois cried in her sweet, impetuous voice, and she looked up at him with tears of relief and gratitude in her eyes. "Not five minutes ago I was hopeless; I told

myself I hadn't a friend in the camp—not a soul to help me—and that they"—and she pointed first to her father, and then to the opposite corner of the shanty, where her lover lay in a heavy stupor which was more like unconsciousness than sleep—"would die, because I could not get a doctor or medicine for them. I thought that no one cared what became of us; and yet at that very moment you were thinking of me—coming to help me! You of all people! Oh, I don't deserve it," and then she took his brown hand in both her own, and looked up at him with such a sweet gratitude and delight in her eyes, that only by a great effort Jim restrained himself, and succeeded in crushing back the fierce desire to take her in his arms and kiss her quivering lips, which suddenly sprang up in his heart and almost overmastered him.

Perhaps Lois read something of it in the eager eyes which looked down at her, for she dropped his hand and coloured vividly. Jim gave an odd laugh.

"Hush! We'll let bygones be bygones," he said hastily. "Only tell me one thing. It was not—your own wish? If you had had your own way, our—friendship might have continued?"

"Yes." She coloured again, and drooped her eyes. "It was not my own wish; I was very sorry," she faltered.

Jim's face grew radiant.

"That is all I wanted to know," he said. "Now tell me—when did the fever begin? How long have they been ill?"

"Father had been ailing for a few days, but we—Fred and I—did not feel alarmed about him until this morning, and then Fred was too ill himself to go for a doctor," Lois answered, "and I did not know what to do."

"You should have sent for me."

"I did not like to do so. I saw that girl from the canteen this morning, and I asked her if there was any one who would go, but—"

"I know; never mind her insolence, Lois," Jim said quickly. "I'll go myself presently, but first you must have a glass of champagne and something to eat. I dare say," and he looked at her enquiringly, "you haven't had much to-day, eh?"

"No, I was too anxious and unhappy to eat," Lois answered, with a faint smile.

She sat down to the table and obediently ate the food he placed before her, and drank the wine he poured out with a

liberal hand ; while he stood and leant up against the door, and watched with quiet satisfaction as the colour came back to her pale cheeks, and the strained look died out of her eyes.

"There, you feel fit now," he said kindly ; "and now I'll get a horse, and go for the doctor at once. Fortunately it will be moonlight. You understand it will be some time before the doctor can arrive. It is a good four hours' ride to Cronje, and that's the nearest place where I can get one ; so you must not be anxious or uneasy if we are longer than you expect. If you'll promise me that, I'll promise the doctor shall be here before daybreak."

"I will do my best," Lois answered.

She followed him outside the shanty, and as, with a nod and smile and a cheery "That's right, keep up your heart," he was turning from her, she put her hand gently on his arm.

"Oh," she said softly, "I am so glad that you came, that you forgave me ! How can I thank you ?"

Jim started. At the touch of those white fingers every nerve in his body thrilled with sudden ecstasy and delight ; his strong hand closed tightly over hers, as he looked down at her. She wore a loose white gown, which was tied round her slim waist, and fell round her in soft, straight folds to the ground ; the sunshine streamed upon her yellow head, and flashed a strange radiance into her beautiful face. Jim's eyes flamed with fierce desire and love as he looked down at her. Again the mad longing to take her in his arms, and feel her heart beating against his heart, the touch of her lips against his own, came over him, and this time he did not as before resist it. It was rarely indeed that Jim Goddart balked himself of any desire, or denied himself any gratification which his senses demanded. So his eyes flamed with a fierce light as he looked at her, and his strong fingers closed more tightly than ever over her fluttering hand.

"Shall I tell you how to thank me ?" he said, in a low, passionate voice. "You don't think I am going for their sakes, do you ? It is for you—because I love you, because I would give my life to serve you ! So—give me one kiss—just one little kiss, Lois !"

She started, gave him a quick look ; she coloured painfully, then paled again, and Jim felt the hand on which his own was clasped grow suddenly cold and rigid. She did not shrink from him, or make

any remonstrance, or give the indignant denial that he had half expected—she stood before him as perfectly still and motionless as a statue ; but when, emboldened by her silence, he bent his head to kiss her, she raised her eyes again and looked at him with such an intense reprobation and wonder, that he paused suddenly and drew back from her.

"Since that is the reward you ask, take it," she said, with a cold disdain in her voice that stung Jim keenly ; "but remember I give it for their sakes," and she glanced back into the shanty, "only for theirs ! Take it if you will, only make haste, and—go," and she raised her fair head and looked straight into his eyes, and held up a pale cold cheek for his kiss.

Jim's colour rose, and his eyes fell under that look. All at once he realised how base and degrading was the thing which he had asked, what a poor and contemptible creature he must seem to her. He dropped her hand suddenly.

"I never took a kiss yet from unwilling lips—I won't begin now," he muttered, and turned away and left her.

Lois stood and looked after him with a strange expression in her blue eyes, with a strange tumult of feeling agitating her gentle heart. Anger was there, and pity, and a strange delight, and all were mingled with a vague self-reproach and shame.

By-and-by she heard the sound of horse's feet, and, moved by a sudden impulse, she went to the door, just as Jim rode past. He did not pause, but took off his hat and bowed low in his saddle.

"Keep up your courage ; I promise you the doctor shall be here by daybreak," he said gaily, and Lois smiled and waved her hand ; and then, feeling cheered and comforted by that parting assurance, she went back and resumed her lonely vigil.

CHAPTER II.

LATE though it was, lights were still burning in many of the houses when, shortly before midnight, Jim Goddart rode into Cronje.

It had been originally a mere mining camp, just such another as Kuranda was then ; but during the last two years a colliery had been opened, and a distillery built, and each had brought with it a considerable influx of population, so that Cronje had suddenly sprung into quite a considerable township, which boasted a

church, two hotels, and innumerable bars and canteens, in addition to dwelling-houses of every size and description.

Jim dismounted at the door of the principal hotel, and giving his horse into the care of the Kaffir groom, ordered two fresh horses to be saddled at once, and asked where the doctor's residence was. He received the gratifying intelligence that he was at that very moment in the hotel, where, so he was further informed, a ball in honour of a wedding which had taken place that morning was being held.

The doctor, who was young and good-looking, and a great favourite with the female portion of the community, had been appointed M.C., and was not particularly well pleased to be disturbed from his pleasant duties by Jim's imperative message. He came into the bar where Jim was leaning against the counter drinking a glass of brandy, and exchanging compliments with the pretty barmaid, and looked sharply at him.

"Well, what is it?" he said impatiently.

Jim took off his hat and bowed courteously, and explained his errand, and assured the doctor that nothing but absolute necessity would have allowed him to deprive the wedding guests of the doctor's society, but that under the circumstances he had no choice but to do so, and ask the doctor to accompany him at once to Kuranda.

"To Kuranda!" The little doctor looked still more annoyed and dismayed. "Why, that's a good four hours' ride from here," he said. "Look here, I'll give you some medicine now, and ride over in the morning. An hour or two can't make much difference. I really can't go now."

Jim looked at him.

"I think you can," he said blandly. "I really think that on second thoughts you will find it advisable to reconsider your determination! You are a stranger here, I believe, but it is possible you may have heard my name mentioned. I am Jim Goddart, at your service."

"Jim Goddart!"

The little doctor was naturally as little of a coward as most of his profession, but he was fresh from peaceful, law-abiding England, and had not altogether lost his inherited prejudices in favour of law and order; and since he came to Cronje he had heard too much of the wild, lawless ways of the diamond diggers, and especially of Jim Goddart, to regard with much complacency the prospect of a midnight

ride alone with him. But still less did he like the idea of refusing to accompany him. The Jim Goddart he had heard so much of would, from all accounts, think as little of putting a bullet through the man who offended or opposed him, as he himself would have thought, in the old days at Guy's, of dissecting the arm or leg of a "subject"; and just then, whether by accident or design he could not tell, Jim's coat happened to fall back, and the doctor saw the barrel of a revolver peeping out of his breast-pocket, and at that, and at the set, determined look in Jim's face, the momentary impulse which had urged him to refuse deserted him.

"Very well," he said, rather sullenly, "since it's an urgent case, I'll go."

"I thought you would," Jim said suavely; "indeed, I have already ordered a horse for you. By the time you are ready," and he glanced at the doctor's dress suit and white tie, and smiled grimly—how many years was it since Jim himself had worn such a suit!—"it will be round."

Dr. Tyrone had many an adventure, and many a strange ride with strange companions in after years, but he will never forget that ride with Jim Goddart across the lonely moonlit veldt. It stands out, and always will stand, clear and distinct from all the other rides of his adventurous life. The slight nervousness and constraint which he at first felt soon wore away. Jim could be a charming companion when he liked, and on this occasion he exerted himself to be entertaining, and succeeded so well that the doctor quite enjoyed his ride.

The night was very hot and oppressive, unusually so indeed, for in Natal, however hot the days may be, the nights are generally cold. The doctor remarked upon this, and wondered what the cause of the unusual heat, and the stifling, oppressive feeling that filled the air, might be. Jim, if he had felt disposed, could have told him that the heat was probably caused by one of the grass fires common enough in that district during the hot weather; but he did not deem it prudent to do so. By-and-by, however, when they had ridden through a great "bush," and emerged from the trees on to the open veldt, the heat became still more oppressive, and the cause of it was soon apparent to the doctor, for far off across the veldt there came rolling along a great cloud of smoke, lighted here and there by darting tongues of flame, and behind the smoke a lurid light, which was

not the light of the coming sunrise, glowed in the eastern sky.

The doctor checked his horse with an exclamation of alarm.

"Look, look!" he cried, and pointed with his whip across the veldt.

Jim nodded imperturbably.

"Yes, bit of a grass fire," he said composedly. "They are common enough in the dry season; Kaffirs, and white men too, for that matter, are such careless beggars. They think nothing of flinging a lighted match or a firebrand among the grass, and then there's a flare-up, as you see. Come on, man, don't stand staring at it," he added impatiently.

But the doctor pulled his horse's head sharply round.

"No—I am going back," he said.

"Afraid, eh?"

Jim smiled superciliously. The doctor coloured hotly.

"Yes, I am afraid," he said. "I don't think I am more of a coward than other men, but I don't care to face that, anyhow. I am going back."

"Nonsense, man; there's no danger! We can reach the ford long before that overtakes us, and the nearer we get to the river the less the danger, for the ground is sandy, and there's less for the flame to feed on. Come along."

"Not I; I am going back," the doctor said resolutely.

"No, you are not."

Jim put his hand on the doctor's bridle and jerked the horse round again. His face had grown very set and grim; under his dark brows his blue eyes looked at his companion full of a cold, relentless determination.

"I promised her that you should be there before daybreak, and you shall, if we have to ride through that hell for it," he said between his clenched teeth.

"I won't, I tell you. Take your hand away!" the doctor cried, and he struck at Jim's hand wildly with his riding-whip.

"And I say you shall;" and then in an instant Jim's hand had gone to his pocket, and the doctor felt the touch of cold steel against his forehead. "Take your choice, man," the inexorable voice said; "ride on, or—" and the steel touched his brow again.

"I'll go; take that away," the doctor said sullenly, and Jim smiled and slid the revolver into his pocket again.

"There's no real danger, man. Fortunately there's no wind. We shall reach

the ford long before that overtakes us," he said composedly; "only don't fool away any more time here."

For some time they rode on quickly and in silence, the doctor casting anxious, perturbed looks towards the cloud of smoke that came rolling across the veldt towards them, but Jim's composed face and perfect calmness slightly reassured him. Perhaps there was no danger, no real danger; and as Jim had said, they would reach the ford before the fire overtook them. No man with the fear of a death so horrible before his eyes, could wear that look of perfect unconcern, the doctor told himself, and the river could not be so very far off now. Just as this comforting thought passed through his mind, his horse swerved suddenly, caught its foot in a hole, and fell, throwing the doctor to the ground. He was not hurt, and was on his feet in an instant; but when with Jim's assistance he proceeded to raise the horse, he found to his alarm and dismay that the poor beast's leg was broken. He looked down at Jim, who was passing his hand gently down the injured limb, with a wild terror in his eyes.

"Curse you, this is your fault!" he cried savagely. "You forced me to ride on—to my death!" and he shuddered and looked wildly at the advancing fire.

"Cheer up, man. If one of us two has to die, it shall not be you, anyhow. Here," he pointed to his own horse, "mount at once."

"What's the use? She won't carry double!" the doctor cried despairingly. "It will only be throwing away two lives instead of one."

"No, she won't carry double, but she'll carry you safe enough," Jim answered coolly. "You know the way, don't you? You said you'd been to the camp before."

"Yes; but you—what will you do?" the doctor cried.

"I? Oh, I can take care of myself. It won't be the first time death and I have had a race together," Jim said carelessly; "and so far I have come off the winner. I dare say I shall now. Don't waste any more time, man!"

"But I have—no right to accept such a sacrifice," the doctor faltered.

Jim frowned and stared at him, and then laughed grimly.

"You," he said, "you? Why, you fool, do you think I care a hang whether you live or die? I promised her," and he set his teeth fiercely, "that you should be at the

camp by daybreak ; I'll keep that promise if—I die for it ! So go at once. You can tell the boys where you left me. I shall make for the ford—if I don't turn up, tell them to look for me there. Mount, I say," and then, as the doctor hastily swung himself into the saddle, he struck the horse sharply with his riding-whip across the flank, and it reared and plunged, and broke into a wild gallop.

Jim looked after him, threw off coat and waistcoat, and went off at a steady, swinging pace across the veldt. He had only gone a few paces, however, before a sudden thought struck him, and he turned and ran back to where the poor horse lay struggling in pain and terror. "A moment more or less can't make any difference," he said to himself, and then he took out his revolver, and shot the horse through the head.

The doctor heard the report, and turned, struck by a new terror, expecting—he scarcely knew what, and was relieved to see Jim still running steadily behind. He looked again and again, as his horse flew onward, looked with ever-increasing anxiety as the cloud of smoke came nearer and nearer, and the tall figure became first a speck, and then lost in the distance, and far away he saw with a thankful heart the moonlight gleaming on the quiet river.

The dawn was breaking when the doctor rode into camp. He knocked up the inmates of the first shanty he came to and told his story, and quickly and silently horses were saddled, and half-a-dozen men galloped out of camp in search of their comrade. They found him where he had bade them look for him, on the river bank, lying unconscious below an overhanging rock, under which he had dragged himself for shelter, and rough, tender hands raised him and carried him back to camp. The fire had overtaken him just before he reached the bank. It had spared his face, but he was terribly burned about the chest and one arm and leg ; and when he awoke to consciousness again he awoke also to an agony of pain. He was conscious by-and-by, in the midst of his torture, of the entrance of a tall, white figure, who knelt on the floor by his side, and put a cool hand on his forehead, and held some cooling drink to his parched lips, and with an effort he forced back a groan, and opened his eyes and smiled at her.

" You see—I kept my promise, Lois," he said.

" Yes, yes ; but at what a cost ! "

" Never mind the cost. He was in time ! Your father and Fred will recover ! " he said.

" Yes, thanks to you," Lois cried. " He says that with care and proper treatment they will recover. They are both asleep now," and then she glanced hurriedly round the shanty.

They were alone, for the doctor, feeling that his presence was not required, had stepped outside, and was leaning against the wooden wall smoking his pipe. With a sudden impulse Lois bent over the mattress ; her blue eyes, full of a strange, beautiful light, looked straight into and met Jim's in a long, solemn gaze. What did each read there in the other's eyes ? What was the unspoken question that leapt up fiercely and passionately in Jim's, the unspoken answer which Lois's gave back in return ? No word was spoken ; yet in that supreme moment of each life heart spoke to heart, and each understood without the aid of words the other's thoughts.

For one long moment they looked at each other, and then the blushes which had dyed Lois's cheeks faded away, and a quiet, beautiful smile came into her face. She bent her head lower, lower still, till Jim felt her light breath on his cheek, a loosened tress of her hair touch his brow.

" Jim," she said, in a low voice full of inexpressible tenderness and love, " you would not take the kiss you asked for yesterday, because I—was unwilling. See, I give it to you now, dear, willingly, with all my heart," and she bent her head still lower, and their lips clung together in a long, silent kiss.

" Doctor, tell me the truth," Jim said late that evening, when Lois, who had gone to and fro from one shanty to the other all the day, had said good-night and left him to the doctor's care ; " will my arm and leg ever be any use to me again ? Shall I be a cripple all my life ? Come, man," as the doctor hesitated ; " speak out. I'm not a child or a woman. I want to know the truth."

" It is impossible to tell at present," the doctor answered evasively, and Jim gave an odd smile.

" Ah, I understand," he said. He did not speak again for some time, and the doctor, fancying he was asleep, and being worn out with his long ride and want of rest, lay down on the mattress in the opposite corner of the shanty. By-

and-by, however, hearing Jim groaning and tossing restlessly to and fro, he rose again, and asked if the pain was worse.

"Ay, almost unendurable. Can't you give me something to put me out of this torture?" Jim said impatiently. "Haven't you any morphia, or chloral, or anything that will give me a few hours' sleep? I shall go mad before morning if this goes on."

The doctor hesitated.

"I could give you a sleeping draught, but I am afraid to do it," he said. "Your nervous system has had a severe shock, and your heart isn't over-strong to start with. It might be dangerous in its present state to give you anything of the kind."

"Well, mix me a draught, anyhow; I won't take it if I can help it," Jim said impatiently; and the doctor, who was half-asleep, did so, and placed it on the box that stood by the bed and served as a table.

"Don't take it if you can possibly help it, Goddard," he said, and Jim promised.

The knowledge that oblivion and sleep were within his reach brought a temporary lessening of the agonising pain, and Jim lay and endured it in silence, and envied the doctor lying on the mattress at the opposite side of the shanty wrapt in the deep sleep of exhaustion. But as the pain lessened his brain cleared, and his mental faculties, which until now had been deadened by suffering, regained their usual strength. Jim thought of many things as he lay awake through the long, slowly-passing hours, and longed for the day to break; thought of the past and the future, of his wild, reckless life, of lost opportunities, of sins forgotten until now; and the black record of those wasted years rose up before him, full of a terrible reproach and condemnation. Then from the past, his thoughts turned to the future, to the question he had asked the doctor, to the evasive answer he had received. Jim understood what lay behind that answer as well as the doctor himself! A cripple! Jim Goddart, who had gloriéd in his strength, who had never known a day's illness in all his thirty years of life, a cripple! Lame and helpless, an object of pity to a few, of contemptuous scorn to others! A cripple for life! Better, oh, far better, to have died out on the veldt; and yet, if so, and if he had died there, he would never have seen that look in Lois's eyes, never felt the pressure of her sweet lips on his own. Ah, that kiss, that

supreme moment of bliss, was worth living for—nay, more, was worth dying for, he told himself! But what of the future? They had been friends, but they could never be mere friends again. What were those lines of Swinburne's he had once read and—a wonder for Jim, who did not care for poetry—remembered:

Take hands and part with laughter,
Touch lips and part with tears.

Ah, friendship between Lois and Jim was impossible now. They had touched lips, they had read each other's hearts, and life could never be quite the same to them again.

He was to be a cripple—a helpless cripple for the rest of his life! The thought was torture to him. He could have shrieked aloud in impotent rage and pain as he tossed restlessly on his mattress, and his wounds burned and throbbed afresh. Would the morning never come? Would that sleeping log in the opposite corner never wake? Then his eyes fell on the rude table by his side, and he saw the draught which the doctor had placed there before he slept.

"Don't take it unless you are absolutely compelled; it may be dangerous," he had said. Jim remembered the words as he stretched out his uninjured arm and took up the glass from the table. He looked at it with an odd smile. There was oblivion there for the present, anyhow; perhaps—who knew?—for ever!

"I guess I'll risk it," Jim said slowly, and then he raised the glass to his lips and drank.

"Died in his sleep; sudden failure of the heart's action, not to be surprised at under the circumstances."

So the doctor told the first anxious enquirer who came as soon as the dawn broke, pale and weary with her long vigil, to ask for news of the sufferer; and then he added kindly, as he saw the deadly pallor that came into the girl's face, and the wild despair that flashed into her sweet eyes at the words: "Better so. If he had lived he would have suffered terribly, and would probably have been a cripple for the rest of his life."

Lois looked at him with wild, dilated eyes. She did not speak, but she motioned him to stand aside and allow her to pass alone into the shanty. Noiselessly she crossed the floor, and stood by the bed, and turned back the handkerchief with which the doctor had covered the dead

man's face. Calm, beautiful, and impassive, it lay back on the pillow, with closed eyelids resting on the pale cheeks, with the faint shadow of a smile lingering on the lips—the lips on which her kiss still rested! There was the look on his face which Nature meant it to wear, on which his mother's eyes had rested with tender pride long years ago—the look of his lost youth and innocence. For a long time Lois stood and looked at him in silence; then she bent her head lower and lower, till her cheek touched his cheek, till her warm, trembling lips rested on the irresponsive lips in a long, farewell kiss.

"I am glad you knew!" she whispered; "oh, I am glad you knew!"

Then she replaced the handkerchief, and drawing her shawl closely over her face, went out with swift, noiseless steps into the cold, grey dawn.

A MIDSUMMER BIRTHDAY.

By HARRIETT STOCKALL.

'TIS midmost June—the roses flush
The red old walls with bloom,
Deep damask, moss, and maiden-blush,
Sweet, quaint old names we learned to know
When first we watched the roses blow;
Old-fashioned flowers that cluster still,
Year after year afresh, and fill
The garden with perfume.

But fairer than the fairest rose
That glads the garden ways,
Is our sweet flower, to whom the close
Of childhood comes to-day, who looks,
With clear, soft eyes, like summer brooks,
(And half in smiles and half in tears,)
Back o'er her one-and-twenty years,
The morning of her days.

Sweet Rose! love-named in happy hour,
Fair Rose! that grew so tall.
The darling of home's guarded bower;
An added blessing to the store
Of bliss once ours—but ours no more—
An added lustre to the light
That lit our hearthstone day and night,
And sparkled over all.

A comfort past all power to tell
When grief became our lot,
When waves of sorrow rose and fell.
Ah! let our dead, asleep so sound
Within the churchyard's holy ground,
By all sweet, sacred memories speak
Of what thou wert, and art—too weak
All words of ours, God wot!

Yet faint would we find words to-day,
Belovèd, for thy sake.
Fond words and sweet love longs to say,
But, thinking of a voice now dumb,
The tender accents will not come;
And through all joyful hopes that we
Feel beating in our hearts for thee,
The sad, old wound will ache.

He should have blest thee, dear, who blessed
Our baby flower of flowers;
A father's kisses should be pressed
On thy fair brow this day of days,
A father's tender words of praise
Should be the first to greet thine ear
In womanhood's new opening year,
Not feeble tones like ours.

He would have blessed thee, dear, as we
Can never hope to bless;
God made brave hearts like his to be
Sure homes of shelter, firm and strong,
To guard their loved from scathe and wrong.
With aid beyond our utmost power,
He would have helped thee in the hour
Of peril and distress.

But, dear, what know we? It may be
Across that ocean dim,
He, seeing all we cannot see,
He, knowing all we cannot know,
May watch in love our ways below.
Ah! take our kisses, take our tears,
And take through our remaining years
The love we owe to him!

JOYCE MELHUISH'S MISDOINGS.

BY LUCIE WALKER.

*Author of "Of Doubtful Character," "The End of his Wor,"
"For Angele's Sake," "With the Smugglers," etc.*

JOYCE MELHUISH was not a well-brought-up girl. To speak accurately, she had had no bringing up at all. The sweet, wilful, motherless baby had grown up into the equally sweet and wilful young woman simply and solely by the light of nature, and without any of those salutary restraints and disciplines which are considered indispensable to the training of the weaker and fairer sex.

There had, in fact, been no one to undertake this training—no one to correct her defects and develop her qualities; that is to say, no one except her father, and what was Colonel Stuart Melhuish likely to do for a pretty daughter beyond spoiling her when he was disposed to make a plaything of her, and neglecting her utterly when other less innocent pastimes engrossed him? So it goes without saying, that poor Joyce was full of faults—faults of which, so far from being ashamed, she was not even aware, until she came to live with her maternal grandfather, Dr. Hepburn, in the quiet old Lowlandshire town of Fenborough.

Fenborough is apt to look suspiciously at anything which oversteps the narrow boundary of its every-day experience. Joyce Melhuish was decidedly an innovation, besides which she embodied an unpleasant complication of circumstances; and Fenborough felt justified in expressing surprise that the Hepburns should so far

forget what was due to themselves, to the family at Fenborough Towers, and to society in general, as to offer a home to the orphan child of their disowned daughter.

Perhaps no one felt more surprise in the matter than the good old doctor himself, nor was any one more fully alive to the delicacy of the position in which he was placing himself with Lady Fenborough; but his part in the prelude to Joyce's coming had not been quite spontaneous—it had been thrust upon him rather against his own judgement by his junior partner, Gabriel Lang.

"Lang is such a fellow," the old man was wont to say, "he gets hold of such queer notions, and though he doesn't exactly persuade you, still, you find yourself doing what he wants you to. And yet I always ask his advice."

Dr. Lang's advice on this particular point had been asked one morning when the partners met in Dr. Hepburn's sanctum for their usual discussion of the day's programme.

On this occasion, after keeping his junior waiting for a quarter of an hour, the elder man appeared with an open letter in his hand, and a look of worry on his face.

"Lang," he said as he shut the door carefully, "what do you think? I've had a letter from my grand-daughter, Joyce Melhuish."

Dr. Lang looked at the letter; he saw it was written on paper deeply edged with black.

"And there is bad news in it?" he said interrogatively.

"Bad news! I should think so! Why, she writes to say that her father is dead."

"Dead?" cried Lang. "Dead! Stuart Melhuish dead?"

"Yes," replied the other irritably. "I don't know why he shouldn't die. He was an old man, and he'd lived a racketty life. He died on Monday at some place on the Riviera, where no doubt there is a gambling hell."

"And what is to become of the child?" asked Lang.

"She isn't a child," retorted the old man, still more irritably, "she's nineteen. Well, she's absolutely penniless. What he has left will barely pay his debts. Here, you can read her letter and see for yourself."

Dr. Lang took the letter, and read it slowly several times, while Dr. Hepburn watched him anxiously.

"Bad case, isn't it?" he said at last.

"It is," said Lang; "and I suppose you will offer her a home?"

"A home, my good fellow! I offer a home to Stuart Melhuish's child—here—at Fenborough!"

"My dear Hepburn," replied the other quietly, "you must remember, she is Sybil's child, too."

"I do remember it; but that makes it none the easier. Think of her ladyship's feelings."

"I don't see," said Lang gravely, "that her ladyship's feelings can count here. Of course, she is the great personage of Fenborough, and we all like to show her proper respect. But Joyce Melhuish is destitute; she turns to you as her natural protector."

"But, Lang," the old man began again, "remember the scandal there was, and the time it took to blow over; and now when people have forgotten it—"

"I see," interrupted Lang, "you haven't got over the old grudge. You can't bring yourself to say: 'I will forgive all that I can't forget.' Of course, it isn't the first time that the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and that the children's teeth have been set on edge thereby. If Sybil did wrong, she paid for it, and really the wrong was in part excusable; she was blinded by the romance. The romance was soon over, and now all that remains of it is one more weak woman to fight her way, friendless, in a hard-hearted world."

Dr. Hepburn's face had softened a little.

"You're trying to probe my weak spot, Lang," he said. "Well, I'll think it over. But, remember, I'm like a city set on a hill, and I shall have to take the consequences."

"There will be no consequences of which you need be ashamed," said the younger man confidently; then he opened the deferred consultation on the day's business.

Dr. Hepburn was perfectly right when he said that he was as a city set on a hill, and that his doings would be freely commented on by his neighbours. He lived—as beffitted his social weight—in one of the square, brown stone houses which stand on either side of the road leading from the lower part of the town to the gates of Fenborough Park, the seat of the Earl of Fenborough. All the Fenburians who were anybody lived in this quarter, and

were invited, on rare and solemn occasions, to partake of the hospitality of Fenborough Towers. They were nearly all old residents, who knew one another's family history and private circumstances with an accuracy which demonstrated clearly how little business of their own they had to occupy their minds; and when the news spread abroad that Joyce Melhuish was coming to take up her abode in her grandfather's house, the half-forgotten scandal to which he had alluded was raked up and discussed with fresh zest, and with the compound interest due to it after twenty years of comparative oblivion.

"I've no patience with Dr. Hepburn," said the elder Miss Stow—who was his opposite neighbour in Park Road. "I told him he ought to have let the girl take a situation, and he says she isn't trained for any post which a lady can take. But surely with the knowledge of foreign languages she must have, and her experience of travelling—seeing she has spent her life dragging all over the Continent—some one would have taken her as a travelling companion."

"Yes, indeed," said Miss Stow, junior. "Well, if he won't hear reason, I shouldn't wonder if he doesn't lose the practice at Fenborough Towers through his obstinacy."

"Really," cried Mrs. Wyeth, "you don't mean that her ladyship has said anything to him?"

"Not that I've heard," was the answer, "but I shouldn't wonder if she did."

"But why should the Countess interfere?" asked Mrs. Lee, the new curate's wife. "What does this Joyce Melhuish matter to her?"

"My dear Mrs. Lee," cried the good ladies in chorus, "don't you know Joyce Melhuish's father was his lordship's own cousin? That makes the girl a near kinswoman to the whole family—to Viscount Marshlands and the Honourable Anthony, and to Lady Janet and Lady Clara."

"Good gracious!" cried Mrs. Lee, duly impressed; "and how came Dr. Hepburn's daughter to marry the Earl's cousin?"

"Well, I'll tell you," said the elder Miss Stow, "though it seems strange you've never heard, for there was an awful fuss over the affair. Joyce Melhuish's mother, Sybil Hepburn, was considered the beauty of the place. People used to say that her father and brothers wanted her to marry Gabriel Lang, who had just passed splendid examinations and bought a partnership with Dr. Hepburn—I believe myself he

was very much in love with her—but she wouldn't hear of him, for her head was turned with all the flattery she got. Then this Colonel Stuart Melhuish came to stay at the Towers. He was a middle-aged man, wonderfully handsome, but with the look about him of having been a dreadful rake, which, indeed, he had been. However, he was supposed to have turned over a new leaf, for he was lately engaged to marry her ladyship's sister—who was no beauty, but had a fine fortune. I don't think it ever came out how Sybil Hepburn and he scraped acquaintance, nor where they met; but anyhow, in a fortnight's time they ran away together—she from her father's house and he from the Towers. Dr. Hepburn followed them to Paris and saw them married properly; and then he washed his hands of her. Colonel Melhuish had to sell out and disappear. I've heard he treated his wife very badly—but that's just what you might expect. It was a great disgrace to the whole town. And then fancy that foolish old man bringing the girl to live in his house—right under her ladyship's very nose!"

The spring sun was shining cheerily down into the placid streets of Fenborough. The fresh, bright green of the elms and limes in Lord Fenborough's park made a tender, youthful setting to the time-worn, grave houses in Park Road, and the lilacs and laburnums lifted clusters of gay blossom above the dull garden walls.

Mrs. Hepburn stood at the dining-room window, looking into the street and waiting; she was too excited to sit down. She was thinking of Joyce's mother. She had not ventured to go to the station to meet the grand-daughter whom she must welcome with such mixed feelings. She had, however, insisted that the doctor should go; moreover, she had hurried him off far too early for the train, and he had had twenty insufferable minutes to spend on the platform, whither, by some curious coincidence, the Misses Stow and Mrs. Wyeth had bent their steps that afternoon. They stood at the bookstall, engaged in an apparently interminable argument over library books. They were obviously waiting for the London train, too.

"Inquisitive old cats!" was the doctor's inward comment. He always maintained afterwards that Joyce's reputation would have had a better chance in Fenborough if those good ladies had not been eye-witnesses of her arrival.

It was easy to single her out at once among the half-dozen or so of passengers who alighted; a tall, shapely girl, dressed in deep mourning. First she looked up and down the platform with an air of self-possession, then she turned quickly to the door of the compartment from which she had alighted.

"My umbrellas, Marshlands," she cried in a clear voice; "they are up in the rack." Then there appeared a young man, laden with a rug-case, a fur cloak, a travelling-bag, and a roll of umbrellas.

He was a small, rather plain young man, with light hair, and a pink complexion, and he looked rather awkward as he emerged with his load.

The Misses Stow and Mrs. Wyeth exchanged scandalised glances. A porter hurried up, touched his hat humbly, and relieved him of the packages.

"I suppose there will be some one to meet me?" went on Miss Melhuish. "Just see, will you, Marshlands?"

"Thank you, my lord," said Dr. Hepburn, hurrying up and taking Joyce's travelling-bag from the young man.

"How do, Hepburn?" said the heir to the Fenborough title, in a voice almost as condescending as that in which Joyce had been ordering him about. "You see, I've had the pleasure of escorting Miss Melhuish. Ta-ta, Joyce, I leave you in proper hands."

"Au revoir," is Joyce's answer. "Come and see me soon."

"My dear," cried one Miss Stow to the other as they walked home, "what do you think of that?" and neither of them found words to say.

"My dear," said Dr. Hepburn, as soon as he had disposed of the necessary enquiries after Joyce's journey, "I had no idea you knew any of the Fenborough family."

Joyce didn't reply at once; she leant back in the brougham and began to laugh.

"I can't help it," she said; "you called him 'my lord' so respectfully; and he looked so important; and it seemed to me so absurd."

"My dear," said Dr. Hepburn reprovingly, "there is nothing absurd about it. Every one here treats the Viscount with respect. He will be Earl of Fenborough some day."

But Joyce did not stand reproved; her eyes shone with the laugh she repressed.

"Yes," she said, "that alone is enough

to make a prig of him. He is a prig, isn't he?"

"No, my dear; certainly not."

"Ah," she replied, "you don't know him as well as I do."

Dr. Hepburn stared in astonishment.

"How is it you know the Viscount so well?"

"Because I've had exceptional opportunities for studying him. We ran up against him at Homburg three years ago, and since then we have run up against him everywhere. He seemed delighted every time, and I wasn't altogether sorry—I got such a lot of fun out of him."

"My dear," said the doctor, in a tone that was meant to be really serious, "you will have to give up getting fun out of Lord Marshlands here."

"Why?" asked Joyce, turning a pair of liquid brown eyes on the old man.

"Because—because," he began hesitatingly, "now that you have come to Fenborough your lot is cast with your mother's people, and his lordship does not belong to our circle—though he is your cousin."

For all answer Joyce laughed again. Then the carriage drew up at Dr. Hepburn's door, and Mrs. Hepburn came out to welcome her grand-daughter.

Before bedtime that night every one in Fenborough knew that Joyce Melhuish had travelled all the way from Paris with Lord Marshlands, and had ordered him about at Fenborough station as though she were quite used to having an earl's heir apparent to fetch and carry for her, which showed great depravity on her part. Still, that was more easy to condone than the misdoing which was laid at her door before the lilac and laburnum flowers had sobered down into clusters of seed-pods.

Dr. Lang's appearances in the small social world of Fenborough were few and far between, his plea being that he was the working partner of the firm of Hepburn and Lang, and that his time and energy were completely absorbed by the lion's share of their large and important practice. But to Fenborough society Dr. Lang was something above and beyond an unquestionably capable medicine man, and among the few marriageable men of the quiet, jog-trot town, not one could show such credentials as his in good looks, good means, and good manners. So, despite his distaste for tea-parties, musical evenings, little dinners and dances, invitations were showered regularly upon him, and the good reasons he gave for refusing them

were accepted without ill-will, because he had always treated every one alike, and because no scheming matron or susceptible maiden could insinuate that she had been distinguished by his special attention.

But with Joyce Melhuish's advent this was altered, and Fenborough exchanged significant glances with itself when it was reported that Dr. Lang had been playing tennis nearly every evening for a whole fortnight on Dr. Hepburn's lawn, with Dr. Hepburn's grand-daughter.

It might be, some one suggested charitably, that the public health was unusually good, and that the busy doctor had more leisure. On this presumption Mrs. Wyeth invited him to tea—without result, and his conduct was freely discussed in his absence.

"Otherwise engaged," said Miss Stow, with a sniff. "Of course he is; we've just seen him go into Dr. Hepburn's."

"Ah, well," rejoined the hostess, with asperity, "if he's gone there, he's gone with his eyes open. I took my opportunity yesterday, when I met him in the street, and told him what every one but himself knows."

"You mean about—," and Miss Stow supplied the hiatus with a significant wave of her hand in the direction of Fenborough Park gates; "and what did he say?"

"He said he made it a point not to believe gossip."

"Gossip, indeed!" cried Miss Stow. "Gossip! Why, our housemaid saw them with her own eyes yesterday evening. The Viscount was riding and she afoot in Lady Anne's Walk, and she was saying: 'Marshlands, you're a noodle; you'll be late for dinner.'"

"She's a terrible old woman, isn't she? Now, come, Dr. Lang, I know I often talk nonsense, but you'll allow I'm uttering words of wisdom when I say that Lady Fenborough is a terrible old woman."

"She isn't old," said Dr. Lang, smiling; "she's barely forty-six. Shall you call yourself old at that age?"

"You're begging the question," replies Joyce severely; "it doesn't matter what people call themselves—they are what other people call them. Besides, I'm really angry with Lady Fenborough. It appears that she has the impertinence to resent my existence—that she has hinted to my grandfather that I must be careful not to come between the wind and her nobility."

Dr. Lang made no reply; he had come

to Dr. Hepburn's that afternoon with the quixotic intention of warning Joyce that the tongue of gossip was busy with what was no doubt an accidental meeting between herself and her cousin. He had adroitly led the conversation towards the subject, and the result of his diplomacy was this philippic.

"She may be a countess," continued Joyce vehemently, "that doesn't prevent her being a snob. I saw her take my measure the first Sunday in church. Oh, how she surveyed me from the lofty height of the Fenborough pew! If she were as clever as you all think her, she would act differently towards me. Do you know she has forbidden Marshlands to keep up the friendship we made abroad?"

"Is Lord Marshlands such a very dear friend, then?" he asked, which was not at all what he had meant to say.

"Good gracious, no!" was the answer; "but why should she keep him away? Put yourself in my place. What would you say if you were I?"

"I would say nothing," replied Lang warily. "I would be as prudent as possible."

"Of course you would," cried Joyce; "it seems to me that Fenborough folks would breathe prudently if her ladyship wished it. But I thought you were a little more independent."

"One is all the more independent for being a little prudent," he rejoined significantly.

"Ah! I know what you are driving at," she said, laughing; "some of those old pussies have seen me talking to Marshlands in the park. If I had been prudent they wouldn't have seen me. And you," she continued, raising her brown eyes frankly to his, "are you thinking all sorts of horrid things of me? Are you going to order me never to speak to Marshlands again?"

He felt a strange thrill run through him from her liquid eyes. "I shouldn't presume to give you orders of any sort," he said; "but I should like to give you a little advice. I am much older than you, you know, and I take a great interest in you for the sake of old times, and for—" He paused, stumbling over words that seemed to come unbidden.

"You are very kind," she said, and he thought he caught a sound of mockery in her voice; "well, I shall value your advice, so pray let me have it."

For answer he held out his hands, and taking both hers, stood for a moment wondering what had happened to him.

"Joyce," came Mrs. Hepburn's voice from the window, "here is tea. Dr. Lang, will you come and have a cup?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Hepburn," was the startled answer. "I fear I mustn't; I've got such a heap of work waiting at home."

"Joyce," said Mrs. Hepburn severely, when they were alone, "what have you been saying to Dr. Lang? He looks so serious."

"He always looks serious," said Joyce. "Moreover, he had been doing all the saying."

Whatever work Dr. Lang had hurried home to do that evening he neglected shamefully. When he went to bed at midnight the result of his labours was contained in a short letter to a London friend who wanted a change of air. The next morning he told Dr. Hepburn that he was going to exchange practices for a month with a doctor at Stepney. "It's Mowbray," he concluded; "you remember Mowbray?"

Yes, Dr. Hepburn remembered him—it was all right. He made no objection, so Gabriel Lang beat a retreat with flying colours.

The East End of London is not a charming place to work in in the summer, especially when a man is too busy to go westward for a breath of fresh air. Dr. Lang, however, was glad to be busy. He had come away from Fenborough determined to work so hard, that he should quite forget how nearly he had allowed himself to drift along the current of what he had taken to be old memories into a flood of new passion. But among the many strange things he came across in Stepney he found no river of Lethe, and the further he removed himself from Joyce's neighbourhood the more vividly her presence was with him. In fact, it is quite possible that Gabriel Lang would never have known how deeply he was in love if he had remained face to face with the danger of losing his heart. During the first week he thought no more of Joyce than he could help. During the second he found that the rustle of her soft dress came to him on the stifling London breeze, the echo of her voice in the clatter of the London streets, the light of her eyes in the glimmer of the hazy London stars. During the last fortnight he counted the days, then the hours, until he should

be back at Fenborough. For a new resolve had ousted his old one. "I will have it out with her," he said to himself. "She can but say no. Anything is better than this state of indecision."

He reached Fenborough by the afternoon train, and an hour later he had walked up Park Road and was enquiring at Dr. Hepburn's door first for the doctor, then for Mrs. Hepburn, lastly for Miss Melhuish.

"The doctor and Mrs. Hepburn are out driving," was the answer, "and Miss Joyce—she's gone for a walk in the park."

Then Miss Stow, from her old post of vantage, saw Dr. Lang take the little passage beside Dr. Hepburn's garden wall which led into Fenborough Park. He would not look for Joyce, he told himself, as he sat down on a bench among the trees, but if she came home that way he would take it as an omen. The air was heavy with the scent of the limes and busy with the hum of countless insects. The sinking sunlight danced in quaint arabesques on the grass. He drew in a long breath—all the old things seemed so new—and there was an oppression at his heart which was neither joy nor pain. What could he say to her? No words would formulate themselves in his mind. He could scarcely think. Presently among the trees he heard a murmur of voices coming nearer—a murmur too low to be distinguishable. He got up restlessly. He had not thought that others might be coming by before Joyce came. Then he stood suddenly still. He had come in sight of the speakers, but they had not seen him. They stood hand-in-hand taking a lover-like leave of one another, and the shifting light fell on the face which had been his dream all these foolish nights and days, and then he saw Lord Marshlands draw Joyce Melhuish—who made but a faint resistance—to his breast and kiss her, not once nor twice, on her forehead, her cheeks, her lips. Suddenly she lifted her head, and seeing that they were not alone shook herself free, and flew, rather than ran, past him, while Lord Marshlands walked slowly towards the invader of his paradise.

"Congratulate me, Lang," he said, holding out his hand with rather a forced laugh. "We've just settled it all, and now I've only got to talk to the governor and the mater."

"Rather a big 'only,' isn't it?" said Lang grimly.

"Oh, there'll be a bit of a tussle, no doubt," said his lordship, "but I shall hold my own. She's worth it, you know."

The next morning, before ten o'clock, Park Road was astonished by seeing the Fenborough carriage stop at Dr. Hepburn's, and the doctor himself was more than a little flurried when his study door opened and Lady Fenborough, her cheeks unusually pale and her lips contracted, entered the room.

"I have come for a few minutes' private conversation, Hepburn," she said in a hard, dry voice, without any preliminary greeting. "I knew I should find you in at this hour."

"I trust your ladyship is not feeling indisposed?" said the doctor nervously, trying to repress a vague misgiving.

"I am feeling far more than indisposed," replied the great lady. "I am feeling seriously annoyed—seriously angry."

"I am sorry to hear it, but if I can be of any use I shall be most delighted."

"I don't think you will be delighted," went on her ladyship, with increased acerbity. "I am come to insist that you send Miss Melhuish away from here this very day."

"Send Joyce away at a moment's notice? But why, Lady Fenborough? Nay, it would be—"

"But you must," interrupted her ladyship, "unless I am to understand that you are conniving at this disgraceful affair, and that you aid and abet her in this entrapping of Lord Marshlands."

"Disgraceful affair—Lord Marshlands—connivance!" repeated the old man, bewildered. "I fail to see what your ladyship means."

"My good Hepburn, there is none so blind as the man who will not see. You surely know what I find is the common gossip of the place—that this girl has been meeting Marshlands day after day, and that she has entrapped him into what he is foolish enough to consider an engagement. Silly boy! As to her, it is plain she is an adventuress."

"But is it not possible," pleaded the old man feebly, "that your ladyship has been misinformed?"

"Misinformed!" rejoined Lady Fenborough sharply. "I tell you I have it all from Marshlands himself—he says he will marry her."

Then, as Dr. Hepburn himself afterwards expressed it, you might have knocked him down with a feather. It seemed impossible that this story should be true.

"Would you like to see her?" he asked, speaking at random in his first dismay.

"To see her! No, thank you! I wish none of us ever had seen her. The object of my visit is to make perfectly clear to you that the girl must go from here. Must, you understand—there is no alternative."

Dr. Hepburn fancies to this day he was about to take up the challenge thus impudently thrown down; that he was about to refuse to banish from her only home the child he had learnt to love. But before he had found words forcible enough to express his open revolt against the frate sovereign lady of Fenborough, the study door opened, and Joyce—her pale face a little flushed and her eyes bright with excitement—stood before them.

"I beg your pardon for intruding," she said in her clear, steady voice, "but they told me that Lady Fenborough was here. I can guess the object of her visit, and I am come to speak a very important word in the matter under discussion." She spoke with a graceful self-possession which the great lady even in her anger could not help admiring. "Lord Marshlands has no doubt told you," she went on, turning to Lady Fenborough, "what I had not mentioned to Dr. Hepburn—that he has done me the honour of asking me to be his wife. Of course, I can understand that you are very angry about his offer, and still more angry that I accepted him. You have come here to say that the marriage is impossible. You are quite right—it is impossible, but," and Joyce smiled bitterly, "not because you say so, not because of any barrier you would put between us. The fact is, I thought the matter seriously over last night, probably while Marshlands was talking of it to you, and the result of my thinking was that I sat down and wrote a letter to him, which he must have had before you left home this morning. In my letter I told him that, even at the risk of giving him great pain, I must take back my hasty promise. You understand, there is no engagement between me and my cousin—positively none. I would not marry him if you wished me to."

Lady Fenborough had listened in mute astonishment to Joyce's impetuous speech, her cold, grey eyes fixed on the girl's animated face, and a feeling of intense relief in her heart. Marshlands would, she reflected, make an outrageous scene, but he was not a strong-minded personage, he would yield to the force of circumstances after the first moment of fierce rebellion.

She heard the girl to the end, then she rose with a contemptuous gesture.

"Your behaviour," she said, "is most incomprehensibly disgraceful. No nice-minded young woman would do what you have done."

"I dare say not," replied Joyce wearily; "but then I don't pretend to be a nice-minded young woman."

In the course of the day a messenger from Fenborough Towers brought a letter to Dr. Hepburn's for Miss Melhuish—a letter which had cost poor Lord Marshlands a long and bitter hour to indite; a letter in which he pleaded and threatened, and despaired and hoped, through three sheets of closely-written paper; a letter which he felt sure would move the heart of the only woman in the world who ever was so tenderly loved. But the appeal had no effect, because Joyce never broke the big seal with the Fenborough arms which gave the missive such an aristocratic air.

When it was brought to her in her room, where she sat, feeling more unhappy than she had ever imagined she could have felt, she gave it back with orders that some one should run after the messenger and bid him return it into Lord Marshlands' own hands.

Late that afternoon another messenger from the great house came riding wildly into Fenborough. He galloped past Dr. Hepburn's, down over the bridge, and into the less aristocratic part of the town, where the exigencies of the practice compelled the junior partner to live. Shortly after, the news had spread far and wide that Lord Marshlands had had a terrible accident while cleaning his pistol, that he lay in danger of his life, and that an eminent London surgeon had been telegraphed for on Dr. Lang's recommendation.

Poor Joyce was in deep disgrace. It was an open secret in Fenborough that her ladyship had interfered with a high hand in Lord Marshlands' love-making, and that the story of the accident with the pistol was merely a polite fiction to screen a far more serious truth. Luckily, under the combined skill of Dr. Lang and the London surgeon the first imminent danger was soon over, but it still remained to be seen whether the patient had strength to combat with the terrible fever which had set in when the ball had been extracted from that part of his anatomy in which his unskilful hand had lodged it. Her ladyship, as she kept watch beside her delirious son and heir, heard a great deal

that was very grievous to her. Night and day one name, coupled with every term of endearment, rose to his lips—Joyce, sweet Joyce, incomparable Joyce. No mother, however hard-hearted, should part him from his Joyce. Would not Joyce revoke the words of that awful letter, or should he have to shoot himself because he could not live without her? Lady Fenborough clenched her teeth and bore it until she could bear it no longer. "Give him something to calm him," she said impetuously to Dr. Lang.

"I am giving him all I can," was Dr. Lang's reply.

"Joyce, Joyce!" came the agonised voice from the bed. "My mother has sent her away."

"Let her come to him," cried her ladyship. "I had rather she had him than that he died. Go to her and explain, and say I have forgiven her."

There was no reason why Gabriel Lang should have accepted such a commission. Joyce's summons to her lover's side need not have come through him, but he took a grim pleasure in being the bearer of the olive-branch which cut him off from the last semblance of hope.

He had not seen Joyce since that memorable evening in the park, when she had hurried past him with that other man's kisses still burning on her face. He almost exclaimed when she came to him now, so pale and worn she looked.

"I hope," he began bravely, "that the message I bring you will cheer you a little. Lady Fenborough wants you to go and help her to nurse Lord Marshlands, who lies in a most critical state. She wished me to say she forgave everything."

The tears rose into Joyce's eyes.

"I am very sorry for poor Marshlands," she said, "but I shall not go to him."

"You will not go!" exclaimed Dr. Lang. "Surely it is your duty to go to him in his hour of need?"

"You must give him a strong opiate," said Joyce, unmoved; "that will be far better for him than to see me again."

"My dear Miss Melhuish," he began again, "you do not understand. Lady Fenborough is ready to consent to your engagement. You will be received on a proper footing."

Joyce smiled bitterly.

"Her ladyship is very condescending," she said, "but I will not go. There is no engagement to recognise; I cannot hold myself bound by a promise which Marsh-

lands forced out of me, and which I regretted the moment I had given."

"Is that what I am to say to Lady Fenborough?" he asked, steadyng his voice with difficulty. "It is a cruel answer."

"It is all I can send," she said simply. "Why should I pretend to love Lord Marshlands when I—when I don't?"

"Miss Melhuish," said Dr. Lang gravely, "you must see that—"

But to his astonishment Joyce lifted a pair of blazing eyes to his face.

"There, there," she cried, "perhaps I see more than you fancy, and I don't want to know how bad you think me. But you can tell Lady Fenborough that this horrid affair is all her own fault. If she had behaved properly to me I shouldn't have tried to defy her. If she had not bullied Marshlands he wouldn't have wanted to make love to me. He never made love to me abroad; he used to fall in love with other girls. He's as shallow as a street gutter. I'm not behaving a bit worse than all the rest of them."

"Very well," he said, rising and speaking rather stiffly. "I will do my best to explain to Lady Fenborough. Good morning."

She let him cross the room, her eyes still fixed on him; he had turned the latch and opened the door when he heard her say faintly:

"Dr. Lang."

He turned.

"It was your fault partly, too," she said, with a desperate effort. "Don't you remember how you began to talk to me for my good in the garden that afternoon? Why did you stop in the middle?"

"I stopped because," he replied grimly, "because I was going to say something very foolish."

"How do you know I should have thought it foolish?" she asked. "On the contrary, I believe if you had said that say out you would have saved all this trouble and worry to Lady Fenborough, and Marshlands, and me."

Whereupon Gabriel Lang shut the half-opened door, and sweeping back all his doubts and hesitations, recrossed the room, and the long-suspended sentence was finished very elaborately.

"And you can make Marshlands well again," said Joyce after a while, when Dr. Lang had found that time did not stand still even on the happiest day. "He's an awfully silly boy, you know, but he really has a sensible constitution."

"Yes, darling," said Dr. Lang confidently. "I and his sensible constitution will pull him through, and as soon as he is well, he shall go off on a little cruise round the world to see if he can't find another Joyce at the Antipodes."

"He'll find Joyces everywhere," replied Lord Marshlands' pearl among women.

"I doubt it," was Dr. Lang's response.

"Ah, well," said her ladyship, when Dr. Lang had carefully unfolded the result of his embassy, "it is just as well. Marshlands has been much calmer since you went. Those last powders seem really quite the right thing."

Of course no one in Fenborough was surprised when, as soon as Joyce's mourning permitted, her wedding was merrily celebrated at the church where her ladyship had once upon a time taken her measure so disdainfully. Every one who came to look at Dr. Hepburn's grand-daughter adorned as a bride knew that she had been setting her cap at Dr. Lang from the very first, and that she had succeeded in entrapping him by wiles which no well-brought-up girl would have stooped to practise.

When Dr. Lang proclaims himself the happiest husband of the most charming wife alive, Miss Stow raises her hands and wonders to Mrs. Wyeth how long that state of foolish blindness will last. It has lasted undisturbed for some time now, and shows no sign of change.

Lord Marshlands sent the happy couple a magnificent wedding present from Japan, and shortly afterwards cast his noble family into the deepest tribulation by announcing from New York that he had just married the widow of a Chicago millionaire, with whom he had travelled from Nagasaki to San Francisco.

CAUGHT IN A LEVANTER.

BY THOMAS E. SOUTHEE.

Author of "Weatherbound," "Waterlogged," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I. BECALMED.

A LARGE schooner-yacht was lying becalmed in the Straits of Gibraltar. The rays of the noonday sun fell with languid sultriness on the white sails of the yacht, and on the clear blue water of the Mediterranean Sea, which sparkled in the sunlight. There was not a breath of wind stirring, not a cloud in the broad expanse of heaven.

The head of the yacht was boxing all round the compass; she was no longer controlled by the action of the helm.

"Well," remarked Augustus Buckley, a gentleman clothed in a gorgeous suit of flannel, who was sitting on the taffrail smoking a large pipe, "I must say I don't enjoy a calm at sea. Of all the discordant sounds I ever heard, these are the most disagreeable. To sit here, and have my sensitive nerves assailed by such a conglomeration of creaking, flapping, grinding, scruping, and other inharmonious sounds, such as have been distracting my acoustic organs for the last three hours, is enough to drive a fellow frantic."

"I think it has been said by an ancient philosopher," suggested his friend, Fred Roberts, who was reclining in a wicker-chair lazily puffing at a cigar, "that 'patience is a virtue,' and that 'experience makes fools wise'!"

"What an enormous amount of experience you must have had, then!" retorted Mr. Buckley.

"Aunty," cried a young lady who was reclining gracefully in an easy-chair, "I wish you would come to these boys. They are jangling again!"

"My dear Bertha," returned Miss Boyton, "I really must decline; they are incorrigible."

"Now, that's too bad, Miss Boyton!" interpolated Fred Roberts. "I did not think you would desert me in this my time of need. As to Miss Rantipole here," and he waved his hand loftily towards Bertha, "one is not surprised at anything she says or does. Jangling, indeed! The very word jars on my ears!"

"Yes, jangling!" repeated Bertha. "I used the word in its strictly lexicographical sense. You were disputing; perhaps you would like wrangling better?"

"Talk about jarring," said Mr. Buckley, as the yacht gave a sudden lurch, followed by a scruple from the main-gaff, and an accompanying crepitation from the boom, "there is something that jars in my ears!"

"Oh, horrid!" cried Miss Boyton; "it sets my teeth on edge."

Meantime Bertha had drawn herself up to her full height, and was casting at the amiable and philosophic Fred one of her most withering glances.

"Look at her now, Guss!" cried Roberts. "Don't she look grand?"

"Superb," responded Mr. Buckley.

"Now, boys," said Mr. Boyton, "I won't have my little girl teased."

"It's Fred, not me, sir," replied Buckley. "He's the most dreadful torment I ever came across."

"Yes, yes, I know," replied the old gentleman, and then, after a pause, he continued: "But really this is tedious work! Blow, breezes, blow," and he unconsciously commenced to whistle to the wind.

"Pray don't do that, sir," interrupted Buckley. "The Mediterranean is a very beautiful but very treacherous sea, and if you whistle like that we might get a levanter, you know, and that would be no joke!"

"Don't listen to him, papa, dear," interposed Bertha. "Fancy a man being afraid of a breeze of wind! A levanter! If it was a hurricane or a tornado I could understand that there was something to be afraid of."

"It's all very well, Miss Bertha, but stop till you have seen what a levanter means," he replied, "and then I think you will alter your tune."

"There! there! it's coming," cried Bertha. "I can feel it on my cheek. Papa, will you instruct Captain Miles to have the cork-jackets and life-belts ready?"

There was a general laugh, but with regard to the breeze, Bertha was quite right, and in half an hour the "Acantha," with a fine westerly breeze, was running past the great rock of Gibraltar.

CHAPTER II. ON A LEE SHORE.

SEVERAL days of fair winds, smooth seas, and beautiful weather followed. Majorca, with its numerous watch-towers, had been sighted; Sardinia had been passed, and they were sailing the lovely Tyrrhenian Sea. The mellow tints of evening were slowly creeping over the sky; there was not a single cloud, not even a streak of purple haze in the far-off western sky, where the glorious sun was slowly sinking into a waveless sea. Never was there a more beautiful sunset. Never had that deceitful Delilah of seas smiled more seductively as the soft twilight crept over its placid surface.

Watching this enchanting scene, with her arm resting in his, was Bertha Boyton and Fred Roberts.

"You won't tease me again, dear, will you? You won't call me Miss Rantipole any more?" she said softly.

"No, darling!" he replied, stooping down and kissing her. "Not if you don't flirt with that fellow Buckley."

"I never flirt, sir!" she said saucily ; "not even with you."

The dinner was announced, and they descended to the saloon. Now the saloon of the "Acantha" was a sight worthy of notice ; a more luxuriously-fitted cabin, with its gold-coloured damask divans and lounges, its harmonious decorations, its mirrors, and its piano, cannot be imagined.

But apart from the beauty and elegance of the surroundings, everything was "couleur de rose" with Bertha. Fred Roberts had proposed and had been accepted, and for the first time in her life Bertha had realised what true happiness was. Papa, who had guessed her secret, was beaming on her, and even stolid Aunt Margaret began to think there was something in the wind.

It was a happy and enjoyable meal, but like all others it came to an end. The heat was oppressive, and they were glad to get on deck again.

The wind had fallen, and there was a great hush ; the sea was perfectly calm, and the atmosphere was strangely oppressive. In the south great banks of clouds were slowly gathering, and altogether the sky assumed a stormy and menacing aspect.

"I think we are in for a breeze, sir," said the skipper, addressing himself to Mr. Boyton.

"Yes, Miles, I am afraid we are," replied Mr. Boyton.

"And it strikes me, sir, that we are in an awkward position," continued the skipper. "If the gale comes from the south'ard we shall be on dead lee shore, and the coast about here is anything but a pleasant one. However, there's no telling what these levanters will do ; they seem to me to blow from all points at once, and the danger results as much from the uncertainty of their course as from their violence."

At this moment a fork of lurid lightning darted across the dark clouds, and was followed by the roll of distant thunder.

Roberts and Bertha were standing side by side.

"How grand!" she whispered, as another great flash illuminated the sea and sky, followed by hoarse muttering of thunder, but more remote than the former.

At this moment the twilight was suddenly obliterated, and an impenetrable darkness overshadowed them. A moment afterwards a blue flame of lightning glanced across the sky and plunged into the sea,

and a peal of thunder, like the crash of doom, burst over their heads.

Bertha crept close to Fred, this time whispering :

"How awful!"

"You had better go below, darling ; the rain will be upon us in a minute."

The skipper had not been idle ; the bowsprit had been partially run in, the storm jib set, the mainsail and foresail close-reefed, and everything made snug in preparation for the gale.

The intense silence continued, and the men's voices, as they carried on their work, had a hollow and far-off sound. A moment afterwards was a sudden roar ; the wind struck the yacht on the broadside, and the skipper's voice was heard above the howling of the wind, crying :

"Port ! hard-a-port, down with it, man —luff and shake her, or over she goes !"

For a second or two Fred Roberts thought it was all over with them. The lee scupper was under water, and in another instant it was rushing over the deck and bubbling into the companions through the crevices. It seemed as though Davy Jones himself had clapperclawed the mast-heads, and was using them as levers to capsize her, while the sails were tugging at her as if they would have torn the spars out of her ; so that he was expecting every second either that she would turn over keel up, or that the masts would snap off short by the deck. But at length the lively little craft came gaily to the wind, shaking her plumage like a wild duck, and then rushed off in a wild career over the waste of hissing waters.

"Rather a close shave, skipper," said Mr. Boyton, with a quiver in his voice.

"Yes, indeed, sir !" was the reply ; "rather too close to be pleasant."

Bravely did the poor "Acantha" battle with the storm. It was blowing little short of a hurricane, and over the low bulwarks the billows rushed with almost irresistible fury, but she rose from them like a duck, and then dived down defiantly into the trough of the next one.

We must now descend to the cabin and see how Bertha and her aunt had been faring. For a few moments after the gale had struck her, and the yacht lay almost on her beam-ends, Bertha and Miss Boyton had been seated on one of the lounges aghast with terror, and then were suddenly thrown from it, and found themselves pitched over to leeward. For a moment or two they sat in a state of bewilderment,

struck with horror and dismay at the violence of the storm.

Poor Miss Boyton sat there pale, dumb, and motionless; she thought her last hour was come. Even when the yacht righted itself, the incessant rushing and washing of the water as it burst over the deck; the trampling of feet, the throwing down of ropes, the sharp, clear voice of the captain; the bellowing of the wind, and hoarse cries of the sailors, were all to her unintelligible, but, at the same time, fraught with terror.

"Come, aunty," said Bertha, holding out her hands, "the danger is all over, I hope. You see the steward and his mate are clearing up the wreck."

Miss Boyton had hardly been seated and had not yet recovered from her fright, when the three gentlemen came in search of what Mr. Boyton called a refresher.

"Oh, Robert!" she exclaimed, "how are things on deck? Shall we be drowned?"

"I hope not," replied her brother cheerily. "We must hope for the best; the wind may go down as quickly as it rose."

"Well, Miss Bertha," broke in Mr. Buckley, "what do you think now of a levanter?"

"That they are not things to be joked about," she answered snappishly.

"I have spoken to the skipper about the cork-jackets and life-belts, and you can have yours as soon as you say the word," he continued.

"That will do, that will do, Buckley!" interrupted Mr. Boyton. "This is no time for jokes and badinage. We none of us can make sure that we shall see the light of another day. Miles tells me the coast under our lee is a very dangerous one. Let us therefore be serious and sober-minded."

"But, papa," cried Bertha, "can nothing be done?"

"There is nothing to be done, child," replied Mr. Boyton. "All we can do is to trust in Heaven's good providence."

So the night wore on, a long and terrible one. The gale continued; the wind howled and raged; the sky was one entire black pall, through which an occasional flash of blue lightning burst out like tongues of flame, revealing, for the time, the huge and angry billows that rolled beneath.

As time advanced, faint streaks of the coming dawn began to show themselves in

the east. Then suddenly there was a lull in the gale; the horizon seemed to contract; the sea became black as ink, and the wind fell to a dead calm.

They were in the vortex, and the silence was appalling.

During this death-like pause in the tempest, infinitely more awful than the roaring of the gale, every sound on board was heard with startling distinctness. This lasted for a quarter of an hour, or more, and then in the distance there came a low but angry growl, and a thick mist came driving up astern. On and on came the gale, roaring angrily, while all around the "Acantha" was still and calm.

"Stand by! stand by! Hold on!" roared the skipper as the gale, in an almost opposite direction, came thundering down with stunning violence, tearing off the heads of the huge billows and crushing down their mountainous crests into a level plain of seething foam, while the "Acantha" was swept before it like an eggshell.

In the midst of this furious conflict of winds and waters, there came several sharp reports, like the firing of a cannon; the backstays and shrouds snapped off like pack-threads, and the masts, deprived of their supports, bent like willows before the gale, and then with a crash broke off short by the deck, and were blown clean over the bows into the sea.

CHAPTER III. FOR DEAR LIFE.

THE crash of the falling masts startled the two occupants of the cabin, and a simultaneous shriek escaped from both. That some dreadful calamity had befallen them was certain, but what was its nature they could not conceive, and they sat staring at one another in blank terror.

The tempest, meantime, continued with unabated fury, but above it all came the clear voice of the captain and the responsive shouts of the crew.

A quarter of an hour or more elapsed, then—boom! went a signal-gun, followed by the whirring of a rocket.

"What is that?" asked Miss Boyton.

"A signal of distress," replied Bertha.

"Then we must be in great danger!"

"Undoubtedly!"

Clank! clank! went the pumps, and boom! went another signal-gun of distress.

"That's the pumps," said Miss Boyton; "we must have sprung a leak!"

"Very probable," replied Bertha.

"What shall we do, dear? It's dread-

ful!" cried the poor lady. "Why, we shall all go to the bottom! Oh! why was I persuaded to come on this dreadful cruise?" and she buried her face in her hands and wept.

Half an hour had passed. The minute-gun continued, and the clanking of the pumps was incessant; but no one came to enlighten them as to the peril they were in, or the nature of the catastrophe which had caused it.

At last Fred Roberts came slowly down the companion stairs. He was drenched, white, and grimy, and, as Bertha sprang to meet him, the thought there was a look of despair on his countenance.

"Oh, Fred, dear," she cried anxiously, "what has been the matter, and why has no one been down to appease our anxiety?"

"Because there was not a hand to spare," he replied. "The vessel is dismasted, and has sprung a leak; and we have all been hard at work clearing the wreck and pumping. They are trying to discover the leak, and if possible, stop it!"

"But, suppose they do not succeed?"

"Then, unless succour comes, Heaven help us!"

"Below there!" sang out the skipper, coming half-way down the companion stairs. "Mr. Roberts! Good news, sir; help is coming; there is a ship in the distance, and she has answered our signals. She's a steamer, if I'm not mistaken, and I think the gale is abating!"

"Thank Heaven! Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Miss Boyton, and the thanksgiving was echoed by Fred and Bertha.

"Come up and have a look, sir," said the skipper, and when the young man stood beside him, he pointed with his fingers. "There! there! almost dead in the wind's eye, and she's bearing down on us fast. At the rate she's travelling, she ought to be alongside in half an hour. But," he went on, lowering his voice, "what I wanted to say is—get the ladies on deck. There's over three feet of water in the hold, and if it comes to the worst, there's more chance for them up here than there would be below."

"Just so, Miles, you are quite right; come down with me, and we'll see what we can do."

"I don't want to frighten you, ladies," said the skipper when they had descended to the cabin, "but, you see, there's nothing like being prepared for the worst, even if the worst should not come. Now, here's two life-belts, and if you'll let me and Mr.

Roberts put them on—it's only a precaution, but I shall feel more satisfied."

"Oh!" cried Miss Boyton, "is it so bad as that?"

"It's bad enough, ma'am; but it won't be any the worse for taking precautions. Now, sir, you put this one on the young lady, and I'll see to Miss Boyton."

"Fred, dear," whispered Bertha, "you won't leave us alone again, will you?"

"No, dearest; only hadn't you better come on deck? It doesn't rain, and Captain Miles thinks it will be safer!"

"You think the poor 'Acantha' is doomed, then?" asked Bertha quietly.

"I'm afraid so. It's no use hiding the danger from you any longer. Our only chance is that the steamer may arrive in time to succour us."

When Bertha and her aunt got on deck, the scene which presented itself to their eyes was a strangely picturesque and almost diabolical one. They were burning a flare, the red flames of which leaped up high in the air, lighting up the deck of the poor dismasted yacht and the angry sea surrounding her with a vivid distinctness. The group of dark figures forward, and the men at the pumps, all stood out in strong relief against the stormy waters that enclosed them and the lurid clouds above.

The streaks of dawn were broadening, and the rain had ceased, but to windward the sky was black as pitch. In the midst of which, now and again, a rocket rose in a stream of light, and then burst into a flood of descending stars, and all was dark again.

The minutes passed quickly, the clanking of the pumps continued, accompanied occasionally by the boom of the minute-gun. The men worked on gallantly at the pumps; it was for life or death.

The water in the hold was increasing fast. There could be no doubt that the poor "Acantha" would founder; whether the souls on board were destined to go down with her was simply a question of time; it might be of minutes.

The great steamer was in full sight. Every time she rose on the crests of the billows, her three lights could be distinctly seen, and then, as she descended into the trough of the succeeding one, they disappeared from view.

Nearer and nearer she came. The poor "Acantha" was wallowing helplessly in the tumultuous sea. The cabin was half-full of water, and the channels were almost awash with the sea.

She was rapidly losing her buoyancy,

and the steamer was still some distance to windward, her huge form, rising on a mountainous wave, towering high above the battered hull of the poor "Acantha."

Instead of abating, the gale was raging with increased violence. The yacht shivered and creaked in every timber, while the sullen roar of the waters was deafening.

Miss Boyton and Bertha clung to the companion calmly awaiting their doom. The steamer rounded to under their lee. At this instant the "Acantha" gave a drunken, sickening lurch. There were cries of despair, and she pitched into the rising sea, groaning and trembling in every plank; then like a guilty thing, made another desperate plunge, and disappeared into the boiling surge.

CHAPTER IV. NOT A SIGN OF LIFE.

THE last sound that reached Fred Roberts's ear as he was rushing aft to Bertha's succour was her despairing cry for help. The next instant he was sucked down by the eddy of the sinking vessel, and all was dark and void. When he came to the surface he struck out boldly in the hope of getting clear of the raffle of wreck which surrounded him. When this was accomplished he looked round to see if among the pale, agonised faces and struggling forms in the water, he could see that of his brave little Bertha. No, she was not to be seen, and a sickening sensation seized him. At this moment he felt himself taken hold of and dragged into a boat, and he fainted.

When his recollection returned he was lying in a comfortable berth, and the doctor was administering some stimulants.

"Where is Bertha?" he murmured. "Is she saved?"

The doctor shook his head, saying:

"No ladies saved at present."

It seemed as if the destruction of the "Acantha" had calmed the rage of the tempest, for immediately afterwards the gale abated, and the sea began to grow calmer, sobbing sullenly like a child after a terrible fit of anger; the morning was dawning greyly. In the east the deep blue of the firmament was warming into magnificent purple, while the amber rays of the yet unseen sun were shooting up in fan-like beams across the sky. Every now and again fierce gusts of wind swept across the ocean, dying away, as it were, in a repentant moan, as if grieved at the destruction it had wrought.

It was with a painful sort of satisfaction that Bertha and Miss Boyton watched the approach of the steamer as she came towering above them on a great billow. It seemed to them that now their rescue was certain; they had no idea that the end of the "Acantha" was so close at hand. The steamer had rounded to, and had come almost to a standstill, and boats were being lowered. At this moment the yacht gave a great lurch and sank beneath them, and they were launched on the angry ocean, and for a time they were both unconscious. Bertha was the first to recover, and she looked around for help, but the steamer had forged ahead, and she and the boats were some distance from them; the next instant a towering wave came roaring down upon them, and they were buried in its angry foam. When this had passed and she had somewhat recovered her breath, Bertha saw her aunt floating helplessly some distance from her, and she swam towards her. The poor lady was in a dead faint, and Bertha raised her head and supported it clear of the water.

A horrible thought came into her mind; with help so near were they to be left to perish? The girl's heart was filled with despair, and she uttered a piteous cry, but it was weak and faint, and there was no response.

Still they floated on, the distance between them and the steamer gradually increasing.

Time went on; the boats which had been moving and circling about on the spot where the yacht had sunk, had evidently given up all further search, had gone back, and were being hauled up; the propellers began to revolve, and the steamer commenced to move slowly ahead. With a cry the poor girl fainted.

"You say there were ladies on board, doctor?" said the captain of the steamer, which was now lying head to the sea, and blowing off steam with angry violence. "I can see nothing of them. I'm afraid they must have gone down with the yacht."

"The gentlemen say they had life-belts on, so that their bodies would not sink," replied the doctor.

The two were standing on the bridge, and the captain was sweeping the ocean with his glass.

"Have a look yourself and see if you can make anything out," said the captain, handing the binocular to his companion.

For some two or three minutes the glass continued to move, as the doctor searched minutely the sea to leeward.

"Yes," he said, "there is something floating there; but I cannot make out what it is."

"Where away?" asked the captain, as he took back the glass.

"About south-west by south. You will see it as it rises on the crests."

"Yes, doctor, you are right," said the captain, as he concentrated his gaze on a small object that rose on the summit of a billow. "There is something; two somethings if I'm not mistaken." Then he turned and hailed the deck. "Mr. Dunt," he said, "let them put a compass on board one of the lifeboats, and steer south-west by south. There is something floating there I want examined. They say there were ladies on board; it may be them."

The boat was manned and lowered, and as soon as she touched the water the tackles were unhooked. The six oars fell simultaneously into the water, and the men pulled with a will.

"All together, my bonnies," said the boatswain, who had charge of the boat. "The doctor says there were ladies on board, and please Heaven we are going to save 'em!" and the men started with a cheer.

"I can see something!" exclaimed the boatswain, after a time. "Pull more to starboard, pull, my lads, pull! Larboard oars best," he continued. "Now, right as you go. There! if that's not a woman's head I'm a Dutchman!" he concluded.

The captain and the doctor still remained on the bridge, watching with intense interest the movements of the boat.

"They have found something," said the captain, as the men tossed their oars, and the boat remained stationary.

"You said there were two ladies, doctor, didn't you?" he went on.

"Yes," he replied.

"Then I think they have got 'em both."

"I hope so," replied the doctor, "but I'm afraid there is very little chance for them; they have been some time in the water."

"More work for you, doctor," said the captain a few minutes after, as two apparently inanimate bodies were lifted out of the boat and carefully taken below.

"Stark dead, sir, I think," replied the boatswain, in answer to the captain's enquiry; "not a sign of life, as far as I could see!"

"Billy's got his hands full," remarked one of the men, as the doctor disappeared down the companion.

"Yes, but I'm afraid they are beyond his skill," answered another.

"Such a sweet, pretty creature!" said another. "I hope she ain't dead!"

CHAPTER V.

THE CALM AFTER THE STORM

The two inanimate forms which were taken below were, as the reader may have already concluded, those of Bertha and Miss Boyton, and as the boatswain had said, there did not appear to be the smallest signs of life about their pale and corpse-like faces. But Mr. Williams—Dr. Billy, as the men familiarly called him—was a man of skill and resources, and as soon as they had been stripped and put into warm beds, he commenced, with the assistance of the stewardess and some of the lady passengers, to adopt active measures to, if possible, restore circulation and animation. Artificial respiration, rubbing, and everything that science had suggested to induce circulation and warmth had been carried on for more than an hour without any sign of returning consciousness.

Meantime the "Aruba" had resumed her course, and was steaming on at full speed in the direction of Malta.

In the saloon there was considerable anxiety and excitement as to the progress of the operation. Time went on, the under-steward had just reported "no change," when he almost immediately returned, and going up to Mr. Boyton said:

"Dr. Williams's compliments, sir, and he is happy to say both ladies have recovered consciousness."

"Thank Heaven! thank Heaven!" cried the old gentleman, and his thanksgiving was echoed on all sides—by none more fervently than Fred Roberts and Augustus Buckley.

Perhaps no two persons had ever been nearer the gates of eternity than Bertha and Miss Boyton, and no two mortals were ever more truly thankful for their merciful preservation than they were.

Bertha, after she recovered consciousness, progressed with such rapidity that ere half an hour had elapsed she was able to sit up and listen to the doctor's account of the circumstances attending her rescue.

Miss Boyton was so completely overcome that she was obliged to remain in her

berth ; but after a time, Bertha, in a sort of jury-rig furnished by the kindness of the lady passengers, came on deck, and Fred Roberts hastened to offer her his arm and lead her to a seat, and as he pressed her arm to his side she felt his heart beating wildly.

"What is the matter, Fred, dear?" she asked ; "what makes you so pale, and why are you so excited?"

"Simply because you are here, well and safe. My heart is full of thankfulness and gratitude. Thankfulness to have you once more safe by my side, and gratitude to Heaven for all our escapes."

They sat on hand in hand in that happy silence which is so eloquent to the hearts of lovers.

It was a soft, moonlit night as the little party of five, who had been rescued after the wreck of the "Acantha," sat in one of the best rooms in the "Medina Hotel," gazing out on to the great rocky island of Malta, its massive fortifications standing out in bold relief against the unclouded sky.

The loss of a large yacht, and the rescue of her passengers and crew, would be an excitement anywhere ; but it was so novel and unprecedented an item in the lives of the garrison and inhabitants of Malta, that either from kindness or curiosity, many people had called at the hotel, full of generous sympathy and offers of assistance. It was after a day of what Augustus Buckley called lionisation, that we find our little party taking their ease, the ladies in soft arm-chairs, and the gentlemen on the balcony smoking.

"Phew!" blew out Mr. Buckley, "how hot it is!"

"Hot!" exclaimed Miss Boyton. "I don't think it is even warm."

"Oh, aunty! you don't mean that?" replied Bertha questioningly.

"Yes, I do, dear; I'm not warm. I don't think I shall ever be warm again; and as to the sea, if I ever get back to Wandsford, I'll take good care not to trust myself to its tender mercies again." She paused for a moment, and then she broke out again : "Dear! dear! what an escape! I really think I should have died if it had not been for you," addressing Bertha. "I shall never forget it!"

"Neither shall I, my dear lady," responded Mr. Roberts. "It's not an experience one is likely to forget. We all had a very narrow squeak for our lives ;

but I think our friend Buckley had the narrowest of all ; but there, if a fellow's born to be hanged it's no use trying to drown him!"

"Of course not," replied Buckley, with a laugh. "It's no use fighting against destiny ; but I'm not going to hop off the hooks just yet. I'll be hanged if I do!"

"Now, boys," broke in Mr. Boyton, "no more squabbling ; let us, who have passed through such great peril, be serious and sober-minded."

"There is one thing, I think," continued Buckley, "that Miss Bertha will do well to remember, and that is not again to laugh at the idea of being 'caught in a levante'."

GOOD-BYE TO SUMMER.

BY PLEYDELL NORTH.

Author of "His Little Girl," "The Story of an Old Piano," etc., etc.

"SHE looks thirty-five."

"I believe she is forty at least."

"And he is only thirty."

"And so good-looking."

"And she is hardly pretty."

"It seems a pity——"

"I call it outrageous!"

Three women in a drawing-room drinking tea. The drawing-room looked on to a lawn, and across the lawn a short while ago a man and a woman had passed.

They had wandered out of sight before the comments which they had evoked had been completed, down into the sunny garden. The woman was small, with a face from which certainly the bloom of youth had faded, but which was yet unlined by age, and held its own attraction. This lay rather in its suggestive interest than in any distinct lines of beauty ; it was a little sorrowful, yet full of wistful vagaries, beneath which lay, perhaps, much inherent sweetness and latent strength.

Her companion was tall, well-made, frank-faced, fairly justifying the eulogiums passed upon him in the drawing-room. He looked the age assigned him, not more. At the present moment he had the air of a man deeply moved, bent upon gaining his point, but still uncertain of success.

If any answer to his passion lurked in her eyes it was veiled, the lines of her mouth were set and somewhat defiant ; her whole air conveyed an idea of struggle against herself and him.

"How can I answer you differently?"

she was saying with forced constraint. "For a few years—yes—you would be content. I do not undervalue myself. I know that now, in the present, I should not disappoint you. I would be to you what you say you need. But when age made itself really felt, visible, and you were still young— Oh, I can't do it."

"What can you think of me?" he said angrily. "Say at once that you do not love me. Love couldn't reason with mathematical exactness, looking forward, counting days and years for its duration."

Her face softened, then grew illumined with a passion that changed it into positive beauty.

"Oh, I love you too well. If I could be to you just what you want now, afterwards I should be content to die."

He laughed with the joyousness of a man who, having gained his immediate desire, is content.

"Well, we'll try it, only postpone the climax indefinitely. Nay, I am not afraid. Trust me a little, Enone, and yourself. Death itself could not loosen your power. What do the years matter to you and me? You will never grow old, love, till I do—"

He held her face softly between his hands, looking into the eyes which made her chief beauty—vague in colour, mysterious as living jewels, holding their own unfathomable light.

She had argued the case with him so often, she had tried to persuade him that she could be his friend, help, confidante, until he wearied and met the woman of whom she knew herself to be but the prototype. She had gauged her strength, and believed that she could so have acted. Why should she tie his young manhood to a half-spent life with irrevocable fixity?

But now as he looked into her eyes her heart failed her; happiness was so near on the one hand, on the other lay the dark valley of long endurance, constant self-suppression, the deeper shadows of unloved solitude and age.

These two people having made up their minds, there was no one to say them nay. Paul Everard was independent, and however much his aunt, Miss Everard, the hostess of the drawing-room, with whom Enone was staying, might disapprove the turn of events, she had no power of interference.

Craven Hall, the property of the Everards, lay scarcely ten miles away. Paul was its undisputed master, and there within a few months Enone found her home.

Six years had passed away of the life of Enone Everard, years which to all outward appearance had brought ample fulfilment of her most hopeful dreams. Yet she hardly bore the look of a happy woman as one autumn afternoon she stood alone in the hall of her own home, a grey figure in a patch of shade on the grey marble, surrounded by slanting rays of yellow sunlight falling through high windows. She was evidently listening, yet the only sounds audible above the ordinary hum of country afternoon life, or stillness, were the lessening sounds of the thud of horses' hoofs down the drive without. A look of strained attention faded from her face as she lost their last echo, and her lips drew in with a sigh of pain.

The years had dealt gently with Enone, as they are apt to do with women of her type, whose attraction depends greatly upon the gathered sweetness of an ideal life, pure in the simplicity of its aim. The far-seeing eyes were clear and luminous as of old, the mouth as mobile, but the hair had in some lights lost its brilliance. She was well and carefully dressed, after the fashion of a woman who still aims at pleasing other eyes than her own, and as she turned and mounted the stairway with a somewhat lagging step, quivering lips and varying colour gave signs all too evident of the keen vitality of absorbing passion in her slight frame.

The thud of hoofs to which she had been listening had been caused by her husband's bay horse, accompanied by the white mare Jenny, hitherto never ridden save by herself, mounted to-day for the first time by one of her guests, Vivienne Dessart.

The master of Craven Hall had made his mark during the past few years, and more than once he had been heard to attribute any success he had attained to the influence of his wife.

For the last three years he had represented the western division of his county, and during that time had issued one or two striking pamphlets on the burning questions of the hour.

His utterances in the House, if not frequent, had also attracted considerable remark; and he was supposed to stand well with the Government, being spoken of generally as one of the rising men of the day. But to Enone success, of its very nature, threatened disillusionment.

Perhaps, after the manner of men, Everard had grown accustomed to his wife, and as the interests of public life

more unremittingly absorbed his attention, he had ceased to think actively of her claims. She was always at hand when needed; her constant toil in his interests, which were hers, was a matter of course; failure on her part was not to be thought of. It never occurred to him that she might need reassurance.

Then in the spring of the present year her health had failed. She was unable to enter much into society, and in enforced solitude her mind, rendered morbidly active by weakness, dwelt unhealthily upon what she read as her husband's growing coldness.

She was still something of an invalid now, when her home was filled with guests, and vague fear had begun to take cruel shape and form, for among her visitors was Vivienne Desart, asked against her own will and by her husband's special desire.

Enone had met Miss Desart during the past season, and had conceived for her that intuitive dislike which some women regard as a premonition. Indeed, from any other point of view the dislike was difficult to account for. Miss Desart was brilliant, good-looking, and amusing, a general favourite in society, notwithstanding the fact that the close of her fourth season saw her still unmarried.

She was undeniably handsome, clever in assimilating current views, and known to be her uncle's sole heiress, yet after a certain point the men hung back. Oddly enough, no one thought of attributing the failure in reaching a satisfactory climax to disinclination on the girl's own part.

Political reasons had rendered an invitation to Craven Hall advisable as regarded Miss Desart's relations, but Enone felt the inclusion of the young lady herself altogether superfluous.

Now, when Mrs. Everard reached the gallery over the hall she turned aside from the solitude she longed for in her own chamber, and entered a small drawing-room, which from its view across the park was a favourite afternoon resort of those who remained in the house. The most idle gossip, she told herself, would serve her better at the present moment than thought.

As chance would have it, the room was only occupied by Mrs. Desart.

When Enone dropped listlessly into the chair beside her work-table, taking up some lace which lay ready to her hand, the stout, comfortable lady on the sofa rose with a little bustle of concern.

"You poor dear, how pale you do look, to be sure! Your husband should take

more thought for your health, Mrs. Everard, he really should; but there, men—young men especially—are all the same: they feel so strong and hearty themselves that they can't understand weakness and ailments. I'm sure I often congratulate myself that Desart 'll have to go down the hill ahead of me. I've got ten years the advantage of him, and a woman wants that."

While she was talking Mrs. Desart fussed restlessly, supplying Enone with undesired cushions and footstool, and showing her other attentions irritating to an overtaxed nerve. Certainly, the report that old Desart had "married beneath him" bore good evidence of foundation. Yet the woman was not ill-natured. It was not until she saw the increased pallor of her hostess's face, and noticed the stiffness of the upright figure, that she became conscious of her blunder, and proceeded to endorse it by explanations.

"Not of course but that you're different, Mrs. Everard—apart from all that—everybody knows there's not such a devoted couple in the county as you and Mr. Everard."

"I think the relations of husband and wife can hardly be judged by strangers," said Enone coldly. "I am thankful, however, to say that my married life has been a very happy one."

"So has mine," said Mrs. Desart heartily—"all but the one trouble of having no children. No one can deny but it's hard on a man—not but that Mr. Desart is very much set on Vivienne—she's a fine girl, and a great comfort when she's with us. It's a pity she don't marry; as I tell her, after a girl has passed six or seven-and-twenty her chances are poor."

"Doubtless it is Miss Desart's own fault that she has not married," said Mrs. Everard. "I cannot blame any one for having some reticence on the point."

"Well, I don't know," said candid Mrs. Desart. "The men don't seem to take to Vivienne beyond a certain point, and yet she's just the sort of girl to be a sensible companion to a man, and Mr. Desart wouldn't be mean about the money, I can tell you, if he liked her choice, and she's just the girl to make a good wife. She was riding beside Mr. Everard, I saw, today when they started. I had hoped that young Compton was taken with her, but they seemed enjoying themselves; I heard them laughing all down the drive—it's natural with young people, isn't it? I notice she can always brighten up Mr. Everard, and she can ride well, Vivienne

can. Mr. Desart spared neither money nor pains on her education."

So the woman prattled on—not of maliciousness, but in ignorance—stabbing Enone's overburdened heart with every fresh utterance.

She bore it unflinchingly, as women can, sewing little points of pain into the pattern of her lace, until the entrance of the tea-tray brought diversion.

The riding-party returned only an hour before dinner. Enone saw nothing of her husband until he came up to dress; then he called to her a few words from his dressing-room, chiefly concerning alterations required in the stables and a new horse he thought of buying.

Miss Desart was a little late in putting in an appearance in the drawing-room. She was not of a temperament to allow the thought that she was being waited for to interfere with her processes of equipment. A long ride required half an hour's complete rest, and the remaining time was all too short for a toilet.

When she did appear, however, she was more than usually brilliant. She had chosen a gown of yellow satin, veiled in a kind of golden gauze. At every point her armour was complete; arms, bosom, neck gleamed like tinted ivory, warm and breathing through the golden tissue. She moved with a sinuous grace, falling into attitudes which Enone felt repulsive, although not openly outraging the canons of taste. As usual the conversation, the attraction of the room centred around her; she dissipated the dulness of the waiting moments for dinner; she was greeted presently with a hail of question and comment from the men, which she answered with a frank freedom which carried her over the thinnest and most dangerous places. A nice, frank, bright girl with no nonsense about her, was the verdict of the county folk, the uninitiated. What others thought remained unsaid.

The evening was a quiet one. The women chatted till the men came to the drawing-room. Miss Desart amused herself slumberously over a photograph book. Then some one asked for music, and she was called upon to sing.

Enone had gone to the inner drawing-room, separated by heavy velvet curtains looped back. Just within the curtains, in the corner of the larger room near the fireplace, stood the piano, an Erard's grand. Miss Desart complained that she had left her music upstairs. Everard rang to order

her portfolio, and in the meantime brought forward that of his wife.

"Oh, this sweet old song! Mr. Everard, I remember hearing you sing it last year; it is so deliciously sentimental. Quite too too, don't you know. Will you let me play it for you now, or is that privilege reserved for Mrs. Everard?"

"I fear the high notes are beyond me to-night, otherwise—"

"Oh! I'll help you out, shall I? Mrs. Everard has let you get out of practice, I fear; but I expect it will go all right."

The song was certainly an impassioned one. Years ago it had held for Enone the first whispered possibility of the love of the man to whom she had since consecrated her life, and he had never sung it since but with her.

She had built around it some of the fair romance of a loving woman's life, and held it sacred still, although its music had long been silent. She was returning to the larger drawing-room when she heard the first chords struck by a strange hand—whose she felt there was no need to ask—and the melody taken up by her husband's voice. She crouched back, her dark velvet gown lost in the darker velvet curtain which she held, her pale face outlined against its folds.

Everard was out of practice, and as he had foretold, his voice failed him in the higher notes; then the clear soprano of a woman took up the refrain, rising in impassioned cadence.

That night Enone lay many hours awake, open-eyed and tearless. Upon every treasured fable of her life it seemed to her that this woman's hand was being laid. How could Everard have sung it, how could he? He might have let the old dream die in peace. She failed to realise that to the man's nature the incident probably held no importance.

On the morrow she arose to a sense of her folly. She had been overwrought, hysterical, extravagant, and imaginative. She heaped blame upon herself; she would speak to Paul, tell him all that was oppressing her. He would help her out of her folly, clear the mists away.

That silly, ill-chosen talk of Mrs. Desart was pressing upon her brain. But at breakfast Miss Desart challenged her host to a set of tennis; other duties claimed Enone—the ordinary routine of life. Everard's indifference chilled the excitement which would have enabled her to speak, and the explanation was never made.

For some little time after this the days

wore on with outward smoothness. Enone's fit of hopeful penitence passed away. Vivienne Desart was always at Paul's side; she sang with him, rode with him, walked or played tennis with him, discussed, it was to be supposed, his hopes, projects, and ambitions—for to his wife he had grown silent—and seemed content.

Paul Everard was at this time a fine-looking man in the full power and activity of manhood, handsomer than when he had wooed Enone. One night when a carpet dance had been suggested and Enone was playing waltzes at the piano, she heard some one near her remark :

"What a splendid couple Miss Desart and Mr. Everard make!" and she knew that her husband and Vivienne had swept past together. Her fingers kept their rhythmical beat, and she gave no sign, but in her heart she began to fancy other utterances. "What a pity such a man should be tied to that plain, elderly woman!"

Had not the thought occurred to Paul already? Down to her inmost thought she held him innocent of intentional evil—she told herself, rather, that it was all quite natural, and to be expected. Had she not bargained her life for a few years of happiness? She pondered how best she might fulfil her vow of considering before all things Everard's well-being.

Meanwhile, her husband remained unobservant of change in her; she was always in her place, always ready to fulfil the duties of her position. People said she looked ill, and was strangely inanimate; then, after a while, other remarks were made in whispers. One day at luncheon, however, Enone heard her husband excuse himself from joining a party arranged for the afternoon to drive to some ruins about five miles away. He put forward the plea of business with his agent, and she knew that he hated excursions of the sort; but there was comfort in the thought that the prospect of the uninterrupted society of Vivienne Desart for some hours had been insufficient to overbalance his objection. The party had been so arranged that it would have fallen to his lot to drive her in the dog-cart—a function which he now relegated to Mr. Compton, to the lady's evident chagrin. Enone had no difficulty in securing her own immunity; it seemed to be taken for granted of late that the hostess should feel unfit or disinclined for active participation in the amusements of the hour.

She saw her guests start, and noticed

with some apprehension that, when half-way down the drive, Miss Desart insisted upon taking the reins.

The horse was a difficult one to manage, but it was too late for warning or interference. She remarked upon the fact, however, to her husband, who was standing near upon the steps.

"Oh, they're all right," he said carelessly; "she can drive."

As they turned away together he added a few kindly words. Perhaps the waness of her face, seen in the breadth of light, struck him, for he told her that she looked as though she needed fresh air, and advised her going for a stroll in the woods. Her heart leaped suddenly. Dared she ask him to accompany her?

Before she could frame the words the agent was seen coming towards them; Paul went to meet him, and once more opportunity was lost. After that Enone had no inclination for the woods; she went to her own room and sat down to think. The man would stay probably about an hour, and then Paul would go to the library to write for the evening mail; he would order his tea to be taken to him there. A few months ago he would have come straight to her room to talk over the business in hand. Still, those few words upon the terrace had given her courage; perhaps, after all, the situation was greatly of her own creation, and needed only those few words which yet it seemed always so impossible to speak. Such a chance as the present might not occur again while their guests remained; when Paul was in the library alone she would go down to him. She waited, counting time almost by the anxious beats of a heart concentrated upon a venture which she believed held the final issues of her life. At length she heard her husband's farewell words to the man of business, then his step across the hall, the shutting of the library door. She waited still a few minutes, pressing her hand to her side, trying to drive back the nervous faintness which she knew would make her stumble in her speech. Then she poured some eau-de-cologne into a glass and drank it; that brought a faint flush to her cheek and steadied her nerve for the moment.

She descended the stairs, driving back foreboding by rehearsing the scene that lay before her. She would go straight to his side, lay her hand upon his shoulder, and look into his face in the old way. Then, if he answered her gently, kindly, she would kneel beside him, perhaps he

would put his arm about her, and her head would find its rest in the old place, and she would pour out all her woe, and there would be peace.

She held the handle of the door, turned it softly, and looked in. Her husband was sitting in his usual chair, his back partly towards the door; kneeling by his side, in her place, was Vivienne Desart.

The woman's face was upturned, pleading, softened, half tearful. The expression on that of the man she could not see—whether it was full requital or the indulgent toleration accorded by a weak man to a woman's flattery and despicable sin.

Nine women out of ten would probably have asserted their outraged dignity and assailed rights on the spot for the sake of possible vengeance.

Such a course was impossible to Enone. She softly closed the door and stole away. The deeper the wound, the keener the wrong, the more sensitively she shrank from its outward proclamation.

Even having gained the shelter of her own room, she neither swooned nor gave way to violence of feeling; she seemed fully alive, and yet incapable of sensation, while looking forward with dumb terror to the awakening of stunned faculties.

Still in the same lethargic state, she allowed her maid to dress her for dinner, even exchanged a few words with her husband through the open door of the dressing-room.

In the drawing-room she speedily heard the ostensible reason for the return of Miss Desart. The horse had bolted, and although no serious damage had occurred, Miss Desart had been too much shaken and alarmed to continue the expedition, and Mr. Compton had accordingly brought her home.

Enone was able to fill the hiatus in the story:

Frank Compton had probably remained in the stables, examining the horse; Vivienne had taken refuge in the library, judging pretty accurately of the likelihood of being found there by her host. The conducting circumstances made little difference to the result, and the fact that Miss Desart's shaken nerves had needed consolation hardly palliated the manner in which it had been sought.

By the majority of the company, however, the incident was hailed as a safe outlet for remark and conjecture in the present rather strained position of affairs, and the little excitement of talk that

surrounded it helped Enone to escape self-betrayal. But beneath her half-drooped lids her eyes burned hotly; no accent, look, or tone, either of her husband or of Miss Desart, was lost upon her; every minute incident of the long, dragging evening seemed charged with terrible significance. She lay awake through the night—with eyes staring into the darkness—trying to grapple with the pain which now threatened to master her very powers of reason, as an enemy unleashed.

Could she have felt assured of the endurance of his new infatuation, of the worthiness and fitness of the woman who had supplanted her, of the ability of Vivienne Desart to consummate in Paul's life the work she herself had begun, she told herself that her path would have lain plainly before her and been comparatively easy, but, alas, on either side, in her life or death, she saw only ruin for the man whose fate she held of infinitely greater importance than her own.

One immediate necessity, however, became clear with the growing hours—for her own honour and the safety of those others concerned, it was necessary that her knowledge of the position should be made plain, and that Miss Desart should leave the house so long as she remained within it.

She rose with the determination to avail herself of the first opportunity of speaking to Paul.

The morning was fortunately wet. Miss Desart—tired, it was to be supposed, with her adventure of the previous day—breakfasted in her room.

When Paul Everard went to his study with his letters and paper, Enone almost immediately followed him.

When she entered the room, he at once rose and pulled forward a chair—under no circumstances could he forget outward acts of courtesy, even to his wife.

She seated herself with scarcely a quickening of the tired beats of her heart.

"You look ill, Enone. I have heard one or two people remark upon it," he said kindly. "So soon as the house is cleared we will go away to Scotland for a month; you need the change."

She tried to speak, to moisten her dried lips, but no words came.

"Is there anything I can do for you this morning?" he went on.

"Paul!"

He started at the sound of her voice. For the first time he eyed her, curiously, keenly, like a man alarmed. A flush

mounted to his forehead, to her staring eyes an acknowledgement of guilt.

"Paul, I opened the library door yesterday, when—"

"Well—when?" he said impatiently.

"You know when—can guess—I do not want to make any scene, any complaints; I have felt it coming for so long. I have only to say that I must—it is necessary that Miss Desart should withdraw from the house—for—for a little while—"

"For Heaven's sake, Enone, don't be so mad. I forbid that such an insult should be offered to any guest of mine."

The insult to herself, then, was to remain unatoned—must even continue.

"Only for a little while, Paul," she said faintly. "To remain beneath the same roof and both alive—it cannot be."

Once more he was startled.

What depths of passion or madness lay hid beneath the softness of this gentle-natured woman! An idea of possible tragedy crossed his mind—of real danger—danger to Vivienne Desart.

He thrust the notion aside as absurd; Enone had always been amenable to his lightest word, incapable, he believed, of sustained or passionate wrath.

She looked old and haggard this morning after the long, sleepless hours and in the strong light; the man, whatever his sense of innocence or guilt, felt that the latter, at any rate, was an unproved quantity; therefore Enone was causing a great deal of unpleasantness on supposititious grounds; therefore anger on his part was justifiable and sensible, as likely to bring her back to the level of common sense.

"You are talking extravagant nonsense," he said. "From the first you have misjudged Miss Desart, seeing her with the eyes of a jealous woman; now you do not even realise the meaning of your words; when you are rational we will speak of this again."

He gathered up his papers to leave her.

"Paul," she pleaded, "it would only be for a little while, then it is I who will go—let me have peace till then."

He stopped, half-way to the door, looking back.

"You seem determined to bring a scandal upon your name and mine—to break up and disgrace your home—ruin me by your outrageous folly. If I can help it you shall do nothing of the kind—you shall not go—at present." Her last words had, as a matter of fact, wrought him to a

white heat of passion. After a moment's pause he went on: "Of course, if, later on, you wish to bring about a separation, I shall not oppose you."

Then he left her. He had not realised the full weight of his words. The suddenness of her revolt had made it utterly astounding; the very manner of it was a fresh irritation. If she had stormed and upbraided, an outlet from the position might have been found. Enone sat for awhile quite still, the clang of his last sentence beating upon her brain.

She could no longer doubt the complete death of his love. He had, as a matter of fact, welcomed the idea of separation hardly born in her own mind. His only fear had been the fear of scandal for Vivienne Desart.

During the day she thought a good deal of those other words of his: "You have misjudged Vivienne Desart from the first, seeing her with the eyes of a jealous woman."

Perhaps this was true, and she might yet secure Paul's happiness. Who had ever spoken ill of the girl?

Yet in the evening she watched eagerly. Would he show any signs of relenting—of desire, even now, to atone? He treated her with cold courtesy.

Towards Miss Desart his manner remained unchanged. Enone made an excuse for leaving her guests at an early hour. Indeed, her face made excuse superfluous. As she passed a recess where two people sat chatting, half hidden, she heard a voice say: "Mrs. Everard looks perfectly awful to-night; she haunts me." And another: "Yes, fancy having such a face of doom opposite you for the remainder of your natural life! Those marriages are always a mistake."

A little further along the gallery she heard her husband's voice mingled with the laughter of Vivienne Desart. They were arranging some tableaux for the following night in the morning-room, and the door was partly open; the other performers had gone in search of further properties, and for the moment these two were alone.

The scene chosen was the parting of Hector and Andromache. Vivienne had robed herself in her classic folds, and even as the true wife passed, they fell into the rehearsal of the stage attitude—the woman's arms raised, resting upon the man's shoulders, her face upturned.

Almost as a breath, with quickened ears, Enone caught her words:

"Ah, that it were true!"

And his :

"Perhaps in its fullest meaning——"

The sequel remained unspoken.

She dragged herself away to the solitude which was her only refuge. She was scarcely conscious of surprise; every chance thrust of circumstance surely combined to urge her into a despair which weakness had no power to combat. Within her room, she locked the door and took from her medicine-chest a bottle labelled "laudanum," which she placed on a table beside the couch at the foot of the bed, then sat down to her writing-table.

She wrote to Paul Everard her last love-letter, telling him as simply as she could how, feeling that her life's work was done, she had determined to end it, rather for his sake than for lack of courage to bear the burden further.

Once she faltered and threw down the pen. It was when she remembered that death meant never to see his face again nor hear his voice.

Then she poured out her love for him in words rendered sacred by a wife's fidelity—possible by the limitless finality of her farewell.

She folded and addressed the letter, and left it where he would see it. Then she took off her dinner-gown, and put on a long white morning wrapper. She had often told herself that she was too old to wear white. But this was her second bridal. Then she hesitated. She had been taught to pray, but the custom had become mechanical in her riper years, for she had no clear faith, and of late her love had stultified even the desire for enquiry or sense of need.

Should she pray to-night?

She stood meekly in her long white gown, with folded hands upon her bosom—a poor, distraught soul beating tired wings in the dark—and said "Our Father" through, with but dim conception of any meaning that might be attached. Yet the words were uttered: "Deliver us from evil." Then she moved forward, and poured the contents of the laudanum bottle into a glass.

Paul Everard, coming to his senses, and disentangling himself from the attentions of Andromache somewhat abruptly, had stepped to the open door of the room in time to see his wife disappear down the gallery.

The helpless despair of her face during

the evening had aggravated him afresh; but now something in the slow languor of her walk, her whole attitude, as she passed out of his sight, filled him with vague alarm, and for the first time acknowledged self-reproach. He told himself that those half-uttered words had to him meant nothing; but if by any possibility heard by her—

In his disquiet the upraised white arms grew snake-like to his imagination, the low whisper which had wrung response, the whisper of a devil.

When he returned to the drawing-room, Enone's absence from the foreground of the scene aided the return of her power; he almost determined to seek her, to make some attempt at explanation and reconciliation.

When an hour passed without her return he went up to her room, and finding the first door locked and receiving no answer to his summons, entered hurriedly through the adjoining chamber. He was met by a sickly smell which made him start nervously, then on the couch at the foot of the bed he saw the white figure lying as it had fallen, motionless, the head thrown back upon the outstretched arm.

For a moment he stood looking down at her. It was a deep and apparently breathless slumber, and her face was marble white; but in the depth of the stillness, the lines marked by middle age, anxiety, and sorrow had faded. It was a wax-on image of a younger woman even than she whom he had wooed and loved seven years before, on which he looked.

"She has fallen asleep," he said, with an effort at self-reassurance. With that sickening smell still in his nostrils, he stooped and laid his hand upon her heart, and bent his head that her faint breath might fan his cheek. Then he flung the window open wide, and pulled furiously at the ball. In passing the writing-table he saw the letter addressed to himself. Breaking the seal, he read enough, even in the moments that passed before the servants came hurrying, to know what he had done.

No medical aid was to be had within five miles, and when messengers had been despatched, Everard entered upon the most bitter and momentous hour of his life. He watched the efforts to restore consciousness to the white, fragile form, knowing in his heart their futility, yet with eager impatience, until the frightened women stole away, leaving him alone in its dread presence. He read her letter kneeling by

her side, threading the interminable dark avenues of remorse, yet believing that her spirit lingered near, that he was upon the threshold of deep, unearthly communion. The words of her love and forgiveness had yet hardly dried upon the paper; it was impossible that Enone should fail him when he needed consolation.

By-and-by the doctor, a clever young practitioner from the neighbouring town, was in the room, and Paul stood waiting on the opposite side of the bed where Enone had been laid, to hear the verdict, which he already knew as a formula by heart.

There was silence for a few minutes. Why did the man take so long to discover such obvious fact?

The words came at last.

"Your wife is not dead. I find no traces of chloroform or other poison. This is a natural swoon; it has lasted, how long do you say? Over the hour? It is a case of extreme vital exhaustion; death may supervene, or grave illness. I cannot predicate results."

The great revulsions of life are met for the most part with outward quietude. Only a sudden relaxation of the tension of features grown drawn and old in the last hour, a slight nervous movement, showed the force of a reaction which lifted from Paul Everard the burden he had taken upon himself, the shadow of his wife's crime, and held the possibility of life and of retrieval.

Examination of the room showed that insensibility must have overtaken Enone at the moment when she held the glass in her hand—it was found upon the floor, hidden by the valence of the couch upon which she had fallen—and the odour of the spilled liquid had helped to establish the conclusion to which her own words had pointed.

Beneath the skilled treatment of the young doctor she before long showed signs of returning consciousness, but for a while it seemed, as he had foretold, that she had but escaped one death to fall into the clasp of another.

In the morning, her state being known, the majority of her guests rapidly and quietly took their departure. Only Mrs. Desart volunteered to remain—"If I can be of the least assistance! Dear Vivienne in a sick-room is invaluable."

Was the offer the result of instigation? Miss Desart, standing near, lifted eyes which were full of pleading, and to Everard of dreadest meaning. He shrank, evading the look, perhaps in disgust, perhaps still, even now, in fear of his own weakness. Whatever the cause, Miss Desart saw the shrinking and the evasion. Her scorn and anger, all the wrath of defeat, flashed out.

"You are crediting me with too many virtues, too much heroism, Aunt Mary," she said coldly.

"Miss Desart would find the task too severe," said Paul, bowing low. "A trained nurse was telegraphed for last night and is now in the house."

There was no further talk of remaining. Weeks passed by, and still Enone knew nothing of the world around her, or of the devotion that hung upon every breath and utterance of her shattered life, while the house was given over to the waiting silence that surrounds the danger of death.

But the awakening came at last.

It was a clear October afternoon, and the pale, golden sunlight stole through half-closed blinds, when she travelled home from long unconsciousness to know that Paul's face was beside her, to feel the clasp of his hand in hers. She was too weak then for more than the silent joy of that bare recognition; memory had grown mercifully faint through the long, dark avenues down which her soul had travelled.

But in the days that followed, these two grew together again; the bitterness of experience had wrought in Paul Everard a maturity which lessened the gap between them, and a depth of earnestness perhaps beyond that which Enone might ever reach.

She welcomed back her life with a gladness of rejuvenescence which made her fragile sweetness fair and childlike, but upon her, too, rested the shadow of the tragedy which had threatened the overthrow of both lives. She had learned that there was a darkness into which no human love might follow to the rescue of her soul, and in the silent hours of returning life realised the blind fatality of her intended sin. So, perhaps, to these two was revealed, even in the depths of suffering, a secret hidden from most, the secret of that Divine thing than which there is surely nothing more commonly profaned, but which in its pure integrity knows neither change nor failure, and may defy even the accidents of time.

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